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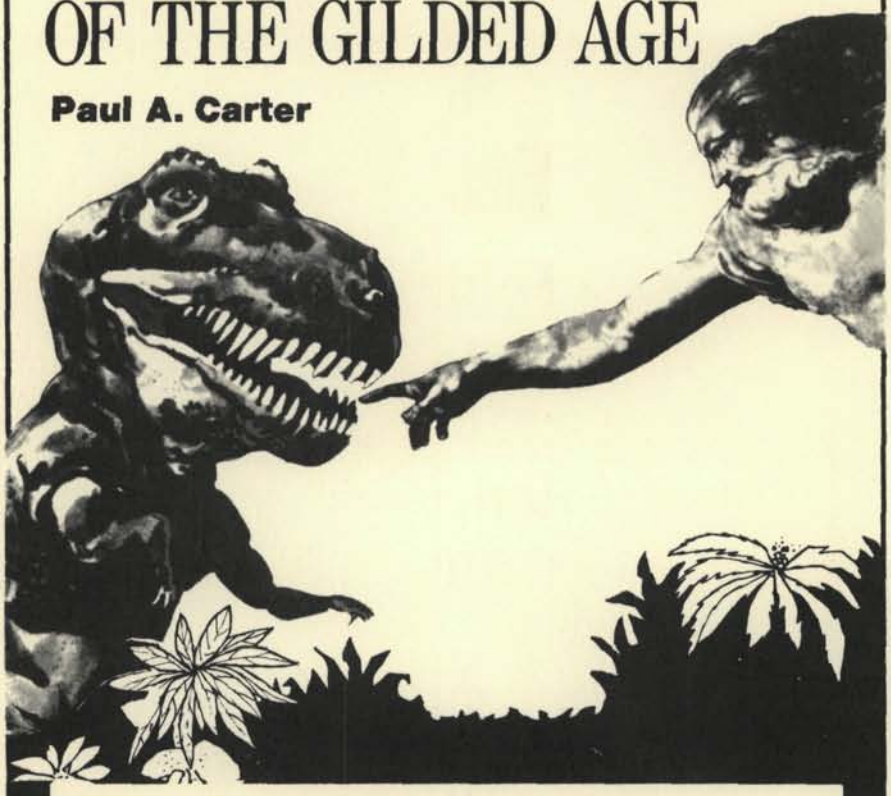

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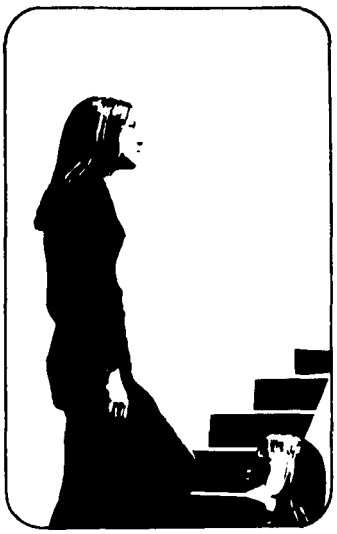

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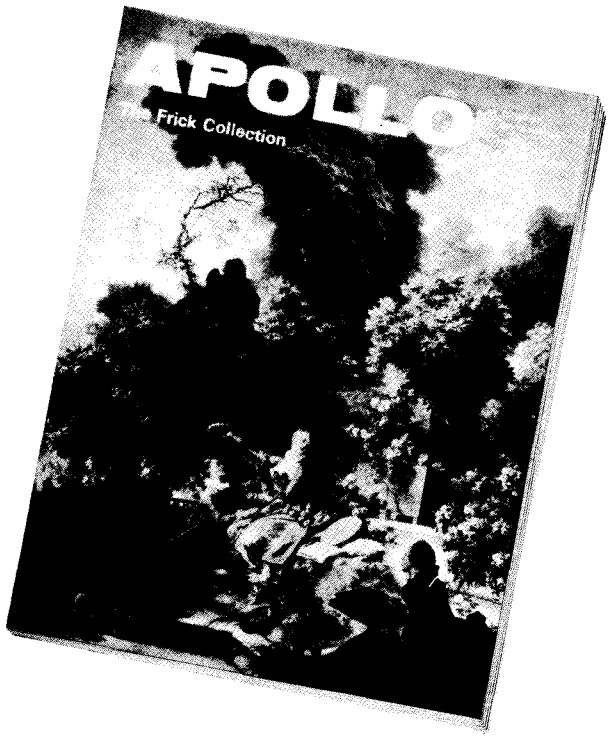

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The Despairing Optimist

RENÉ DUBOS

I participated last December in the ceremonies for the awarding of the National Medal of Literature to Lewis Mumford. This was an especially moving occasion for me because Mr. Mumford has had a continuous and always enriching influence on my development for almost half a century. In fact, it was one of his early books, *Sticks and Stones,* published in 1924, that first made me become actively involved in the influence of the environment on the quality of human life. Even though several decades have passed since I first read *Sticks and Stones,* probably in 1928, I believe I can remember why this small book was an experience that changed my perception of the world.

I was then a young laboratory scientist, living among nonscientists at International House on Riverside Drive in New York City. Because my knowledge of English, and of American life, was limited to scientific subjects, I made it a point to read almost anything that came my way, almost irrespective of content. The titles of only six books remain in my memory from this unsystematic foraging, this attempt to supplement the sketchy knowledge I had acquired from two years of English in a Paris *lycée* and three years in an American laboratory. Two of these novels probably do not deserve to be mentioned in the SCHOLAR, but must have been at one time on a best-seller list. One of them, *The Constant Nymph,* brings to mind a vague impression of lots of chamber music in a sentimental atmosphere. There was nothing in the novel really congenial to me, and I have forgotten both the plot and the name of the author. The other novel was entitled *So Big,* and I know that Edna Ferber was its author. As I remember today, there is in it the story of a young woman teacher taking a job in a small Wisconsin town and seeing for the first time a large field of cabbage at sunset; she exclaims with enthusiasm, "Cabbage is beautiful!"—to the surprise and contempt of the farmer who is driving her from the railroad station to her new home. I was obviously more entertained by the vision of the cabbages than by the rest of the story, which I have forgotten.

Walter Pater's *Greek Studies* greatly impressed me, but it must have been in a rather abstract way, because the only memory I have retained of it is the length, rather than the content, of the chapter on Dionysus. In contrast, I remember almost everything of Ernest Hemingway's *Men Without Women*—the brawl among Irishmen in a Third Avenue bar, the sweat streaming from prizefighters in training, and especially the terseness and concreteness of the language. Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* gave me the feeling that I understood the nature of the forces that had created the genius of America, but while I still admire the book, I now realize that historical developments are never so simple that they can be accounted for by a single sweeping theory. I cannot trace through what happy accident I came across *Sticks and Stones,* but I know that the book immediately caught my attention. In 1955 Lewis Mum-

✪ In a *New York Times* review of RENÉ DUBOS's recent book, *A God Within,* Walter Arnold wrote, "If there is still a question what to call Professor Dubos, 'philosopher of earth' would be exact."

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ford published a new edition of it with extensive notes describing the evolution of his thoughts on architecture and planning, and these additions have increased still further my admiration for his achievement.

I can say without exaggeration that *Sticks and Stones* taught me a new way to look at the world of reality. As a young laboratory scientist, I knew how to recognize phenomena, but chiefly within the frame of abstract theoretical concepts. As a product of French education, I had some awareness of the humanities, but in a rather abstract way. By contrast, I found that Lewis Mumford dealt with architecture and planning—subjects related to both science and the humanities—in the very earthy terms of sticks, stones and the concrete experiences of daily life. This approach satisfied me so completely that I immediately knew that I had discovered a master to my taste—a guru—little realizing that he was my senior by little more than five years. Ever since, I have continued to marvel at the manner in which Lewis Mumford deals with any subject—architectural history, literary criticism, social justice—without ever dissociating his intellectual and ethical vision from his sensory experience of life.

The phrase sensory experience helps me to understand Lewis Mumford's impact on my attitude toward human problems. I remember a statement in his early writings to the effect that the architectural quality of a skyscraper—or for that matter of any structure—cannot be judged from a photograph or a painting or any other figurative document, but only from the total experience it produces on the persons who use it. What matters is not how the building looks on paper, but rather how people approach it, function in it, live with it. The sanity and vitality of Lewis Mumford's writings—and I believe of his life as well—is in large part a consequence of his constant emphasis on total experience.

May I say in passing that this concern for total experience has enabled him to detect one of the weaknesses of modern science and technology. As a result of our professional training, we scientists and technologists are inclined to focus our attention on the quantitative, so-called objective aspects of reality, and to neglect the world of personal experience, which is qualitative and subjective. We tend to make quantity and feasibility, rather than quality and desirability, the dominant criteria of professional achievements and in particular of the technological enterprise. In contrast, Lewis Mumford has long affirmed that many of the things that can be done should not be done because they threaten the quality of life. I remember the storm of protests generated in the scientific press by the criticisms of certain forms of science and technology that he voiced in *The Myth of the Machine*. And I notice with amusement that the most orthodox scientific journals now devote pages and pages to the search for a philosophical and ethical doctrine of science based on the respect for nature, especially man's nature—just as Lewis Mumford has long advocated in all his writings.

Lewis Mumford is now internationally known as writer, literary critic, social philosopher, political activist, student of architecture, of urbanism and of planning. But he denies being a professional in any of these fields. Instead he regards himself as a "generalist," who brings "the scattered specialisms together, to form an overall pattern." In my opinion, however, he is far more than a generalist, because he is really delineating a new approach to the scientific problems of life and of human life in particular. His unique contribution is to study these problems in the light of many and varied sciences and cultures, including the technological culture. The science of man that he is thus creating does not ignore anything of the past, but refuses to accept that the future will be merely an extension of present trends.

I believe Lewis Mumford is now writing his autobiography, and this should provide material for an explanation of the forces that have enabled him not only to present an encompassing picture of man and of the total living experience, but also to discuss scientific problems from the point of view of the moralist.

A strong moralist mood was in fact de-

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tectable in his very first book, *The Story of Utopias,* which he published in 1922 at the age of twenty-seven. This was a prophetic book with a theme that has now become one of the dominant concerns in all affluent civilizations—namely, the difference between the good life and what Lewis Mumford himself has called the "goods life." With ever increasing scholarship and passion, he has continued to study and to oppose the acceptance by modern society of what he has called the megamachines—the huge social and technological structures that increasingly control man's activities, yet are less concerned with his welfare than with power, wealth and industrial growth for growth's sake. Along with a very few other social prophets, beginning with Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society,* he has pointed to the disastrous human consequences that follow acceptance of the technocratic power structure, the military industrial complex, and all the other expressions of the technologic establishment that seem so often to operate as independent forces, as if they had escaped from human control.

For the time being, Lewis Mumford's analysis of the roles that social and technological megamachines have played in the evolution of mankind has reached its best-documented and most forceful expression in the two volumes of *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (1967) and *The Pentagon of Power* (1971). On casual reading, expressions such as "the megamachine" and "the myth of the machine" seem to imply a narrow-minded, antitechnological attitude. But this interpretation does not do justice to the breadth of Lewis Mumford's vision.

Admittedly, one of the views he wants to convey is that, contrary to general belief, the most distinctive and precious attributes of mankind did not emerge from the use of tools—let alone from modern technology. New evidence is constantly appearing that man is not the only tool-making animal. Since other species use and make tools, it is probably less important for the understanding of humanness to trace the progressive development of technology from pebble weapons to atom smashers, than to identify the drives that made Stone Age man bury his dead, use feathers and flowers for decoration, translate his activities into complex symbolic forms—in other words, do things that animals do not do.

But while Lewis Mumford believes that human life will lose its unique attributes if it becomes identified with the socio-technological megamachine, he has no sympathy for the neo-Luddites who delude themselves with the illusion that mankind should, or can, return to the Stone Age ways of life. He opposes not the machine but its misuse; what he advocates is that social and technological institutions be so restructured that instead of merely fostering political power or economic gains, they serve real human needs and enlarge human life.

Nothing could be more redundant than yet another plea for the rehumanization of life, but there is a lyric and prophetic quality, as well as cracker-barrel earthiness, in the way Lewis Mumford has preached this cause for half a century. Along with Emerson and Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Mark Twain, Robert Frost and Joseph Wood Krutch, he belongs to the peculiarly American tradition of the populist sage, bent on teaching moral and cosmic values but always with both feet on earth. Furthermore, his moralist evaluation of the machine age has an authentic quality that derives from his early technical education and from his large store of scientific knowledge, plus his experience as a Dutchess County gardener. One can sense in his writings an almost manual grip on ideas—the skill to take a system apart and then rewire it into working order. When he vituperates against the machine age, it is not for lack of appreciation of what science and technology have contributed to our lives. It is—to repeat once more—because he believes that machines should be used to extend human capabilities, not to replace human functions.

In my first column of this series (Winter, 1970-71), I expressed the view that Joseph Wood Krutch was fundamentally less pessimistic than he publicly stated. Despite his despair and anger at what he saw happen-

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ing around him, even in Arizona, he retained a robust faith based on the resilience of nature and on the fundamental sanity of mankind. There was no place in his life or in his writings for existentialist nausea. As I pointed out then, his attitude was very similar to the one he himself attributed to Thoreau. In Joseph Wood Krutch's words, Thoreau "had faith in man's potentialities though little respect for the small extent to which man had realized them. . . . Thoreau's return to nature was a return to the fatal fork, to a road not taken, along which he hoped that he and others after him might proceed to a better future."

The belief that mankind can retrace its steps and start all over again seems to be part of the American tradition; it is the American form of belief in utopias. Lewis Mumford began his public life with a book about utopias and it seems to me that, like Joseph Wood Krutch and all those of us who read a social message in Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," he believes that man has a second chance to discover the good life, if he is willing to abandon the road on which he is traveling and take another one in search of a new utopia. I believe that even though Lewis Mumford usually speaks as a pessimist, his real temperament is utopian optimism. I should acknowledge here that when I expressed this view in front of Lewis Mumford on the occasion of the award of the National Medal of Literature, he gently but firmly asserted that he was neither an optimist, nor a utopian.

I know of course that utopias are usually regarded as naïve and ineffective attempts to escape from the complexities of life; but in fact utopian imaginings imply the creative kind of fantasy that shapes the future. The utopian despairs about the state of the world, yet retains enough optimism to believe in the possibility of its redemption. Lewis Mumford is the most outspoken despairing optimist of our period and also its most authentic utopian.

There is no need of psychoanalysis to uncover his fundamental optimism. It is plainly stated in all his writings. The real prophets of doom, he has repeatedly stated, are not those who criticize technological civilization, but those who accept the domination of the machine. The optimists in contrast are those who deeply believe that the human person has always been, in William James's phrase, "the starting point of new effects." In this regard, there comes to my mind the statement by the French social philosopher, Elie Halévy, that pessimism is a character trait whereas optimism is a philosophy.

A reason for optimism is that the social institutions responsible for our present difficulties are not so stable as commonly believed, and will collapse after the formative ideas that have brought them into being have begun to dissolve. Lewis Mumford has demonstrated by his own way of life that the changes that can "restore autonomy and initiative to the human person all lie within the province of the individual soul." He derives faith in the future from perceiving in society "a steady withdrawal of interest, a slowing down of tempo" which will inevitably damage the myth of the machine and weaken the dehumanized social order it has brought into existence. The forces of life that are reasserting themselves in the youth movement, for example, will eventually replace the present mechanical world picture by an organic picture with man at its center.

Lewis Mumford, the despairing optimist, believes that mankind will flourish in the future by integrating its store of knowledge with its yearning for elemental modes of life. And if we believe the last phrase in *The Pentagon of Power,* this future may not be far from us: "For those of us who have thrown off the myth of the machine, the escape hatch is visible and the way out—the human way out—already opens before us in our minds." For me, Lewis Mumford's truest voice came in his clarion call to a scientific conference two years ago in the halls of a famous New York institution: "We must learn to be flower-children again, and rejoin the old procession and pageant of life. . . . There is no wealth but life. Let it flower."

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Technology, Nature and Society

The Vicissitudes of Three World Views and the Confusion of Realms

DANIEL BELL

THE CONFUSION OF REALMS. If we ask what uniquely marks off the contemporary world from the world of the past, it is the power to transform nature. We define our time by technology. And until recently we have taken material power as the singular measure of the advance of civilization.

The philosophical justification of this view was laid down a hundred or more years ago by Marx. Man has needs that can be satisfied only by transforming nature, but in transforming nature he transforms himself: as man's powers expand he gains a new consciousness and new needs—technological, psychological and spiritual—which serve, further, to stimulate man's activity and the search for new powers. Man, thus, is defined not by nature but by history. And history is the record of the successive plateaus of man's powers.[1]

But if, as Marx states in *Capital,* man, in changing his external environment, changes his own nature, then human nature in ancient Greece must have been significantly different from human nature under modern capitalism, with its vastly different needs, wants and technical powers. And if this is so, how is it possible, as Sidney Hook asks, to understand past historical experience in the same way we understand our own, since understanding presupposes an invariant pattern? This is a problem not only for historical materialism but for all philosophies of history.

Only once, to my knowledge, in a fragment written in 1857, did Marx try to wrestle with this conundrum, and his answer is extraordinarily revealing:

> It is a well-known fact that Greek mythology was not only the arsenal of Greek art but also the very ground from which it had sprung. Is the view of nature and social relations which shaped Greek imagination and Greek [art] possible in the age of automatic machinery, and railways and locomotives, and electric telegraphs? Where does Vulcan come in as against Roberts & Co.; Jupiter, as against the lightning rod; and Hermes as against the Credit Mobilier? All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature. . . . Is Achilles possible side by side with powder and lead? Or is the *Iliad* at all compatible with printing press and steam press? Do not singing and reciting and the muses necessarily go out of existence with the appearance of the printer's bar, and do [they] not, therefore, disappear with the prerequisites of epic poetry?
>
> But the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that Greek art and epos are bound up with

©DANIEL BELL's most recent book is *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society.* This essay was delivered, in part, as the second of the Frank Nelson Doubleday Lectures, at the National Museum of History and Technology in Washington last winter. In this version, most footnotes and scholarly citations have been eliminated. The complete version of the essay will appear in a volume to be published by Doubleday this winter, in honor of its founder.

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certain forms of social development. It rather lies in understanding why they still constitute with us a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment.

And, Marx declares, such art is the *childhood* of the human race, and carries with it all the charm, artlessness and precocity of childhood, whose truths we sometimes seek to recapture and reproduce "on a higher plane." Why should "the social childhood of mankind, where it had obtained its most beautiful development, not exert an eternal charm as an age that will never return"? That is why we appreciate the Greek spirit.

The answer is a lovely conceit. Yet one must know the sources of the argument to understand its consequences. For Marx this view derived, in the first instance, from the conception of man as *Homo faber,* the toolmaking animal; the progressive expansion of man's ability to make tools is, therefore, an index of man's powers. A second source of this view was Hegel, who divided history into epochs or ages, each a structurally interrelated whole, and each defined by a unique spirit, qualitatively different from the others. From Hegel this view passed into cultural history with its periodization of the Greek, Roman and Christian worlds, and Renaissance, baroque, rococo and modern styles. Sociologically, Hegel's idea is the basis of the Marxist view of history as successive slave, feudal, bourgeois and socialist societies, each based on a specifically different mode of production. Behind it all is a determinist idea of progress in human affairs, or a *marche générale* of human history, in which rationality, in the Hegelian view, or the powers of production, in the Marxist conception, are the immanent, driving forces of history, obedient to a teleology in which anthropology, or a man-centered world, replaces theology, or a God-created world.

Today we know that of the two views, that of *Homo faber* is inadequate, and that of the march of society and history is wrong. Man is not only *Homo faber* but *Homo pictor,* the symbol-producing creature, whose depictions of the world are not outmoded in linear history but persist and coexist in all their variety and multiplicity through the past and present, outside of "progressive" time. As for the nineteenth-century view of society, just as the mechanistic world view of nature has been destroyed by quantum physics, so the parallel determinist theory of history has been contradicted by the twentieth-century clash of different time-bound societies.

We come back then to our initial question: what marks off the present from the past, and how do we understand each other? How, for example, do we read the ancient Greeks, and how would they read us? The answer lies, perhaps, in a distinctive interplay of culture and technology. By culture, I mean less than the anthropological view, which includes all "nonmaterial" factors within the framework of a society, but more than the genteel view, which defines culture by some reference to refinement (for example, the fine arts). By culture I mean the efforts of symbol makers to define, in a self-conscious way, the *meanings* of existence, and to find some justifications, moral and aesthetic, for those meanings. In this sense, culture guards the continuity of human experience. By technology—in a definition I will expand later—I mean the effort to transform nature for utilitarian purposes. In this sense, technology is always disruptive of traditional social forms and creates a crisis for culture. The ground on which the battle is fought is nature. Here I want to deal largely with the vicissitudes of nature as it is reshaped by technology, and the vicissitudes of technology in its relation to society. To that extent I have to forego any extensive discussion of culture, although I shall return to that theme at the end.

II

WHAT IS NATURE? What is nature? Any attempt at specific definition brings one up short against the protean quality of the term. Nature is used to denote the physical environment and the laws of matter, the "nature" of man (for example, "essence") and the "natural order" of descent (for ex-

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ample, the family, in botany and society). We talk of "natural selection" as the fortuitous variations in individuals or species that assure survival, and "natural law" as the rules of right reason beyond institutional law.[2] In a satirical passage in *Rasselas,* Samuel Johnson has his young Prince of Abyssinia meet a sage who, when asked to disclose the secret of happiness, tells him "to live according to his nature." Rasselas asks the philosopher how one sets about living according to nature and is offered a string of generalities that expose the wise man's emptiness.

For my purposes I restrict the meaning of nature to two usages. The first is what in German—whose fine structure of prefixes allows one to multiply distinctions—is called the *Umwelt,* the organic and inorganic realms of the earth that are changed by man. This is the geography of the world, the environment. The second is what the Greeks called *physis,* or the order of things, which is discerned by man; this natural order is contrasted with *themis,* the moral order, and *nomos,* the legal order. For my purposes, then, nature is a realm outside of man whose designs are reworked by men.[3] In transforming nature, men seek to bring the timeless into time, to bring nature into history. The history of nature, then, is on two levels: the sequential transformations of the *Umwelt,* as men seek to bend nature to their purposes, and the successive interpretations of *physis,* as men seek to unravel the order of things.[4]

We begin with the *Umwelt,* and with myth. Man remakes nature for the simple and startling reason that, of all living creatures, "natural man" is not at home in nature. Nature is not fitted to his needs. This is the insight first stated by Hesiod in *Works and Days* and retold by Protagoras, in the Platonic dialogues, to spell out a moral about human society. The story, of course, is that of Prometheus and Epimetheus. The two brothers, foresight and hindsight, are charged by the gods with equipping the newly fashioned moral creatures with "powers suitable to each kind." But unaccountably—perhaps because of the younger's pride to excel—Epimetheus asks his older brother for permission to do the job, which is granted. He begins with the animals. Some are given strength and others speed, some receive weapons and others camouflage, some are given flight and others the means of dwelling underground; those who live by devouring other animals are made less prolific, while their victims are endowed with fertility—"the whole distribution on a principle of compensation, being careful by these devices that no species should be destroyed."

But without forethought, Epimetheus squandered all his available powers on the brute beasts, and none was left for the human race. Prometheus, come to inspect the work, "found the other animals well off for everything, but man naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed, and already the appointed day had come when man, too, was to emerge from within the earth into the daylight." Prometheus, therefore, stole from Athena and Hephaestus the gift of skill in the arts, together with fire. "In this way man acquired sufficient resources to keep himself alive. . . ." Nature became refitted for man.

As Prometheus says, in the play of Aeschylus:

I gave to mortals gift.
I hunted out the secret source of fire.
I filled a reed therewith,
fire, the teacher of all arts to men,
the great way through. . . .

I, too, first brought beneath the yoke
great beasts to serve the plow,
to toil in mortals' stead. . . .

Listen, and you shall find more cause for wonder.
Best of all gifts I gave them was the gift of healing.
For if one fell into a malady
there was no drug to cure, no draught, or soothing ointment. . . .

The ways of divination I marked out for them,
and they are many; how to know
the waking vision from the idle dream;
to read the sounds hard to discern;

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the signs met on the road. . . .
So did I lead them on to knowledge
of the dark and riddling art.

Natural goods are those we share with the animals, but cultivated or fabricated goods require the reworking of nature: the husbandry of soil and animals, the burning of the forests, the redirection of the rivers, the leveling of mountains. These demand acquired powers. The introduction of *techne* gives man a second nature, or different character, by extending his powers through adaptive skills and redirective thought; it allows him to prefigure or imagine change, and then try to change the reality in accordance with the thought. The fruits of *techne* create a second world, a technical order which is superimposed on the natural order.

In the imagination of the Greeks, these stolen skills were powers of the gods, and with these powers man could begin that rope dance above the abyss that would transform him from "the kinship with the worm," in the phrase of Faust, to the godlike knowledge that partakes of the divine. Prometheus was punished, and, in the romantic imagination of Marx as well as Shelley, Prometheus was the eternal rebel who had dared to act for men. The paradox is that today the romantic imagination, having turned against *techne,* must be puzzled about its primal hero. Most likely, the new shamans would say that the punishment was justified. But that is another story, for another day.

I now jump almost two thousand years, from Protagoras to the seventeenth century C.E., to a radically new way of looking at nature and of organizing thought—the rule of abstraction and number.

Mythology, the first mode of depicting the world, is based on personification or metaphor. Nature is a creative or vital force ruling the *Umwelt*. In *Prometheus Bound* the characters are called Ocean, Force and Violence, or, in the later personification of the tides of destiny (we cannot escape metaphor in our speech), *Moira* (Fate) and *Tyche* (Chance) as the two principles that rule our lives. Through characterization we can dramatize our plight, and search for meaning in expressive symbolism; that is the virtue of the poetic mode. With abstraction and number we can state causal or functional relationships and predict the future states of, or manipulate, the world. Nature is an order of things. The heart of the modern discovery is the word *method.* Nature is to be approached through a new method.

In terms of method, the first innovation, that of Galileo, was the simplification of nature. Galileo divided nature into the world of qualities and the world of quantities, the sensory order and the abstract order. All sensory qualities—color, sound, smell and the like—were classified as secondary and relegated to subjective experience. In the physical world were the primary quantities of size, figure, number, position, motion and mass, those properties that were capable of extension and mathematical interpretation. No one experiences geometrical space and mathematical time; these are constructed. The worlds of poetry and physics, the idea of natural philosophy, were thus sundered.

Equally important was the contrast with the classical Aristotelian view that Thomas Aquinas had enlarged upon in medieval thought. Then, the object of science was to discover the different purposes of things, their essences, their "whatness" and their qualitative distinction. But little attention was paid to the exactly measured *relations* between events or to the *how* of things. In this first break with the past, measurement and relation became the mode. To do so Galileo shifted the focus of attention from specific objects to their abstract properties. One did not measure the fall of an object, but mass, velocity, force, as the properties of bodies, and the relations among these properties. The elements of analytical abstraction replaced concrete things as the units of study.

The search for method that was initiated at this time and taken up by Descartes was not just an effort at exactitude and measurement, but had a double purpose. The first was to raise the general intellectual

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powers of all men. An artistic ignoramus with a compass, said Descartes, can draw a more perfect circle than the greatest artist working freehand. The correct method would be to the mind what the compass is to the hand. Second, with this "compass of the mind" one could create a general method that would be a flawless instrument for the unlimited progress of the human mind in theoretical and practical knowledge of all kinds.

That "dream of reason" is symbolized by a famous episode in Descartes' life. One day, confined to his room by a cold, he resolved to discard all beliefs that could not pass the test of reason. That night he had an intense vision, and with feverish speed he perfected the union of algebra and geometry—the complete correspondence between a realm of abstraction and a realm of real world space—that we now call analytical geometry. As Descartes wrote:

> As I considered the matter carefully it gradually came to light that all those matters only are referred to mathematics in which order and measurement are investigated, and that it makes no difference whether it be in numbers, figures, stars, sounds, or any other object that the question of measurement arises. I saw consequently that there must be some general science to explain that element as a whole which gives rise to problems about order and measurement, restricted as these are to no special subject matter. This, I perceived, was called universal mathematics. . . . To speak freely, I am convinced that it is a more powerful instrument of knowledge than any other that has been bequeathed to us by human agency, as being the source of all others.

Intoxicated by his vision and his success, Descartes declared, "Give me extension and motion, and I will construct the universe." And with Newton's mathematical method of computing the rates of motion, the calculus, the universe was constructed in exact, mathematical deductive terms.

> The universal order [said Newton], symbolized henceforth by the law of gravitation, takes on a clear and positive meaning. This order is accessible to the mind, it is not preestablished mysteriously, it is the most evident of all facts. From this it follows that the sole reality that can be accessible to our means of knowledge, matter, nature, appears to us as a tissue of properties, precisely ordered, and of which the connection can be expressed in terms of mathematics.

But what of design, purpose, value, *telos?* Nothing. What we have with this "watershed," as Arthur Koestler has called it, is, according to one's temperament and values, the desacralization, or the demystification, of nature. The use of mathematics to discover the underlying order of the universe is, after all, not new. The Pythagoreans sought to discern form, proportion and pattern, expressed as relations, in the order of number-shapes and intervals that could be expressed in musical terms. The discovery that the pitch of a note depends on the length of the string that produces it, and that concordant intervals in the scale are produced by simple numerical ratios, was a reduction of "quality to quantity," or the mathematizing of human experience. But with the Pythagoreans, as for Kepler, the mystical and scientific modes of experience were joined, each to illumine the other. With Galileo comes the radical separation. "He was utterly devoid of any mystical, contemplative leanings, in which the bitter passions could from time to time be resolved," Koestler writes; "he was unable to transcend himself and find refuge, as Kepler did in his darkest hours, in the cosmic mystery. He did not stand astride the watershed; Galileo is wholly and frighteningly modern."

With Galileo, physics is prescinded not only from mysticism but from "natural philosophy" as well. Aristotelian physics is valuative, reflecting a world conceived in hierarchical terms. The "highest" forms of motion are circular and rectilinear; and they occur only in "heavenly" movements of the stars. The "earthly" sublunar world is endowed with motion of an inferior type. But in the Newtonian world view, the idea of the heavens is detached from any ascending hierarchy of purposes, as envisaged by Thomas Aquinas, and is but

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a uniform, mathematical system on the single plane of motion.

Finally, in this mechanistic world view the world becomes sundered from the anthropomorphic image of a wise and loving Father, or the theological image of the being whose powers are so miraculous that he can create a world out of nothing—the doctrine of *creato ex nihilo*. As Spinoza put it in his geometry: "Nothing comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws. . . . She keeps a fixed and immutable order." And purpose and final cause? "There is no need to show at length that nature has no particular goal in view, and that final causes are mere human figments. . . . Whatsoever comes to pass, comes to pass by the will and eternal decree of God; what is, whatever comes to pass comes to pass according to rules which involve eternal necessity and truth."

Thus, the order of nature, *physis,* is some vast *perpetuum mobile* whose every point in time and future state can be deduced mathematically from the fundamental principles of its mechanical action. Nature is a machine.

A third vision: man the inventor, the experimenter, as the active, purposive intervener in the processes of nature, replacing nature herself as that creative, vital force to subordinate and bend the *Umwelt* to men's will. This view centers not on myth or mechanism but on man as an active reshaper of the world. The key word here is *active*. If there is a radical difference between classical and modern views, it is the abandonment of the contemplative attitude toward nature, aesthetics and thought, and the adoption of an activist attitude toward experience and the environment. All of modern epistemology is dependent on an activity theory of knowledge.

Our science and technology, Lynn White has written, grew out of the Christian view of nature as the dominion of men over the earth and other creatures. This may be too facile. Christian thought, as Clarence J. Glacken has observed, is also characterized by a *contemptus mundi,* a rejection of the earth as the dwelling place of man and an indifference to nature. And while Christian thought, to follow White, may have felt alien from the idea of a "sacred grove," and could be prodigal in its waste of nature, it did not have the impulse to rework God's designs for man's purposes.

It is in the period roughly from the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth that the sources of the idea of man as a controller of nature and an active agent—in mind and in matter—begin to take shape. For our purposes, there are two such sources. One is a new and growing emphasis on *practical activity,* and the emergence during the Renaissance of a group of remarkable men, artist-engineers, who united rational training with manual work in laying down the foundations of experimental science. These artist-engineers, as Edgar Zilsel remarks, not only painted pictures and built cathedrals but also constructed lifting engines, earthworks, canals, sluices, guns and fortresses; discovered new pigments, formulated the geometrical laws of perspective, and invented new measuring tools for engineering and gunnery. Among them were Filippo Brunelleschi, the principal architect of the cathedral of Florence; the bronze founder Lorenzo Ghiberti; the architect Leon Battista Alberti; the architect and military engineer Giorgio Martini; the incomparable Leonardo da Vinci, who drew maps, built canals, created weapons and designed craft to submerge under the sea and fly through the air; the goldsmith, sculptor, gun constructor and adventurer Benvenuto Cellini; and, in Germany, Albrecht Dürer as surveyor and cartographer. Related to them were those who supplied navigators, geodesists and astronomers with their instruments, and clockmakers, cartographers and military technicians who created new tools. Their knowledge was empirical, but they sought to systematize and generalize their experiences, and recorded them in diaries or treatises for their colleagues and apprentices. From these experiences they tried to discover theories for general application. "Practice in paint-

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ing must always be founded on sound theory," Leonardo wrote, and Alberti's book *On Painting,* based on geometry and optics, attempted to create a new "compass of vision" which would guide all use of perspective in art, as almost two hundred years later Descartes would seek a method for the compass of the mind.

The second source of the "activity principle" derives from the Cartesian revolution in concepts. The contemplative tradition of mind, going back to Greek and Christian thought, saw the human being as an observer passively regarding a world unfolding in front of him; knowledge was a copy, so to speak, of a picture of what that outside world was like. So long as science followed Aristotelian realism, and the world was just what its picture seemed to the mind, there were no difficulties. But Galileo offered a different conception. Water, for example, was not just a wet, formless fluid of varying temperature that one could observe, but a number of particles of matter whose motion followed definite laws. And for Descartes, the qualities of wetness and coolness were not just properties of water but generalized concepts in the mind that perceived the water. Knowledge of nature, or of the world, thus depended not on immediate experience but on the axioms of geometry and the categories of mind.

The world of appearance and the substructures of reality had come apart. Yet the two could be joined, for what one knows, as Kant developed the idea, is a function of the categories by which mind relates different worlds of fact and appearance. Mind organizes perception through selective scanning, takes different attributes and properties of objects or events, groups these together for the purposes of analysis and comparison, and organizes them into conceptual systems whose use is tested by empirical application. Mind is thus an active agent in the making of judgments about reality. But these judgments, to be valid, have to be confirmed through the prediction of consequences. To know the world, one has to test it. In this way, rationalism and empiricism are interlocked through *praxis.*

Thus, a new world view: the emphasis on practical activity and on the role of mind as an active formulator of plans reworking the categories of nature. As Descartes observed in part four of the *Discourse on Method,* what he was looking for was a science and technique that would make men "the masters and possessors of Nature."

The spread of a world view requires a prophet. The prophet provides the passion for a view; he makes claims (usually extravagant) and gains attention; he codifies the doctrine and simplifies the argument—in short, he provides a formula for quick understanding and a moral rationale for necessary justification. For this new world view there were two significant prophets: Francis Bacon and Karl Marx.

Francis Bacon—lawyer, politician, essayist and lord chancellor of England in 1618—was not a scientist. As Alexander Koyré has remarked: If all of Bacon's writings were removed from history, not a single scientific concept, not a single scientific result, would be lost. Yet science might have been different without him, or without someone of his literary gifts. For what Bacon did was to formulate the modern credo: science as the endless pursuit of knowledge; the experiment as the distinctive mode of science; and utility as the goal and purpose of science.

Of the endless pursuit of knowledge, Edgar Zilsel has observed:

> The modern scientist looks upon science as a great building erected stone by stone through the work of his predecessors and his contemporary fellow-scientists, a structure that will be continued but never be completed by his successors. . . . [Science] is regarded as the product of a cooperation for non-personal ends, a cooperation in which all scientists of the past, the present and the future have a part. Today this idea or ideal seems almost self-evident. Yet no Brahmanic, Buddhistic, Moslem or Catholic Scholastic, no Confucian scholar or Renaissance Humanist, no philosopher or rhetor of classical antiquity ever achieved it. It is a special characteristic of the

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scientific spirit and of modern western civilization. It appeared for the first time fully developed in the works of Francis Bacon.

Against scholasticism, Bacon emphasized the importance of the experiment. He was himself an enthusiastic experimenter, so much so that he died from a cold he caught while stuffing a dead chicken with snow during an experiment on the preservation of food.[5] Bacon believed in the experiment as the foundation of inductive thinking. Science today has a less exalted view of induction, and the most sophisticated philosophies of science mock its possibilities; yet the idea of the experiment remains the necessary condition for the disconfirmation of hypotheses. As Charles C. Gillespie has noted: "Bacon's emphasis on experiment did shape the style of science. So strongly did it do so that the term 'experimental science' has become practically a synonym for 'modern science,' and nothing so clearly differentiates post-seventeenth-century science from that of the Renaissance, or of Greece, as the role of experiment."

But experiment, for Bacon, was linked to a specific purpose: "The true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers." As with Leonardo, one finds in Bacon an admiration for the inventor and the experimenter, and a contempt for the pretensions of authority (at least that of the past; at the courts of Elizabeth and James he was a toady and was rewarded for his obsequiousness with a peerage: one can say that he rendered unto science that which was science's and to Caesar that which Caesar demanded; when survival is at stake, it is difficult to be harsh on the courtier). It was to the mechanical arts, to industry and seafaring, to the practical men, that Bacon went for the source of knowledge. The scholastics and humanists, he declared, have merely repeated the sayings of the past. Only in the mechanical arts has knowledge been furthered since antiquity. In Bacon's philosophy, there is no choice to be made between basic and applied science. On the contrary, applied science is by definition basic; it is the object of the search.[6]

All of this is summed up in his last book, *The New Atlantis,* a utopian fable. The choice of form and the selection of place are certainly not fortuitous. The form is a voyage of discovery. Fresh to the times are the great voyages that have expanded man's geographic vision, and for Bacon these voyages symbolize the broadening of intellectual horizons as well. The place is Atlantis, the lost continent of the cosmological allegory of the *Timaeus,* the place where Plato introduced the notion of a demiurge as artisan-deity, the one who creates an orderly universe out of recalcitrant materials.

In Bacon's utopia, the philosopher is no longer king; his place has been taken by the research scientist. The most important building in this frangible land of Bensalem is Salomon's House, not a church but a research institute, "the noblest foundation . . . that ever was upon the earth and the lantern of this kingdom." Salomon's House, or the College of the Six Days Works, was a state institution "instituted for the production of great and marvelous works for the benefit of man." Of the thirty-five pages that make up the complete work, ten are devoted to the listing of the marvels of invention that have been gathered in this treasure house. The Master of the House, speaking to his visitors, declares: We imitate the flight of birds: for we have some degree of flying in the air; we have ships and boats for going under water. There are engines for insulation, refrigeration and conservation. Animals are made bigger or smaller than their natural size. There is a perspective house to demonstrate light, a sound house for music, an engine house to imitate motions, a mathematical house, and "houses of deceits of the senses, where we represent all manner of . . . false apparitions, impostures, illusions and their failures."

For Seneca (who faced similar political problems) and the Stoics, the exploration of nature was a means of escaping the miseries of life. For Bacon, the purpose

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of knowledge was utility, to increase happiness and to mitigate suffering. In summing up the marvels, the master of Salomon's House bespeaks the boundless ambition of all technological utopias. "The end of our foundation," he says, "is the knowledge of causes and the secret motions of things . . . the enlarging of the bounds of human empire to the effecting of all things possible."

For Marx, like Protagoras, man is the measure of all things. But what is striking in Marx is his fierce contempt for the romantic cult of nature and his denigration of sentimental idylls—"drivel," he called them—about the land and the forests. In *The German Ideology,* Marx mocks the utopian socialists who see a harmonious unity in nature. Where the "true socialists" see "gay flowers . . . tall and stately oaks . . . their satisfactions lie in their life, their growth, their blossoming," Marx remarks, "'Man' could [also] observe . . . the bitterest competition among plants and animals; he could see . . . in his 'forest of tall and stately oaks,' how these tall and stately capitalists consume the nutriment of the tiny shrubs. . . ."

This sarcasm is all the more remarkable since Marx came to his own philosophy through the forest of Feuerbach, his mentor, who preached a sensual cult of nature and proclaimed Man rather than God as the center of the world. In an essay Marx wrote in 1850, a review of a book by Daumer entitled *The Religion of a New Age,* he renounced any kind of Feuerbachian cult of "man" or "nature." Where the author tries to establish a "natural religion" in modern form, based on reverence for nature, Marx counterposes science:

> [In the work] there is no question, of course, of modern sciences, which, with modern industry, have revolutionized the whole of nature and put an end to man's childish attitude towards nature as well as to other forms of childishness. . . .

For Marx, nature is blind, nature is necessity. Against blind nature is conscious man, who, in his growing consciousness, is now able to plan and direct his future. Against necessity, the need to toil, is a new demiurge to wrest plenty from a recalcitrant nature, history. In the movement of history comes the point, in the dithyrambic phrase of Engels, where there is the "leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom," the "genuinely human" period to which all recorded history has been an antechamber. As Marx writes in *Capital:*

> Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized men, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as the blind forces of nature. . . . But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.

The fulcrum of all this is human needs. Cartesian rationalism and Kantian idealism had created a theory of mind as activity, against the old passive materialism. But for Marx, consciousness alone, although it can interpret, that is, prefigure, a world—this is the "realization" of philosophy—cannot change it. Man does so because he has needs that can be satisfied only by transforming nature. With Marx, the activity theory of mind is reworked as an activity theory of material needs and powers.

For Marx the agency of man's power is technology. History is the history of the forces of production, and the significance of the modern era is the extraordinary power that a new class in history, the bourgeoisie, has achieved through *techne.* In the *Communist Manifesto,* the herald of the socialist revolution, Marx wrote a

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startling panegyric to capitalism:

> The bourgeoisie was the first to show us what human activity is capable of achieving. It has executed works more marvellous than the building of Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals. . . .
>
> During its reign of scarce a century, the bourgeoisie has created more powerful, more stupendous forces of production than all preceding generations rolled into one. The subjugation of the forces of nature, the invention of machinery, the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steamships, railways, electric telegraphs, the clearing of whole continents for cultivation, the making of navigable waterways, huge populations springing up as if by magic out of the earth—what earlier generations had the remotest inkling that such productive powers slumbered within the womb of social labour.

"The bourgeoisie cannot exist," wrote Marx, "without incessantly revolutionizing the instruments of production. . . . That which characterizes the bourgeois epoch in contradistinction to all others is a continuous transformation of production." These forces of production, however, are held in check by the property owners, those who can only be superfluous in the new society, and this contradiction sets limits on the development of the economy and the productive forces themselves. Remove the bourgeoisie, and all the brakes on production will be released.

What is clear from all this is Marx's faith in technology as the royal road to utopia; technology had solved the single problem that had kept the majority of men in bondage throughout human history and that was responsible for almost all the ills of the world: economic scarcity. Because of scarcity each man is pitted against the other, and man becomes wolf to man. Scarcity is the condition of the state of nature, which is why, says Marx, Hobbes was right—the state of nature is a war of one against all.

The "end of history" is the substitution of a conscious social order for a natural order. The unfettered reign of technology is the foundation of abundance, the condition for the reduction, if not the end, of necessity.[7]

III

What Is Technology? Technology, like art, is a soaring exercise of the human imagination. Art is the aesthetic ordering of experience to express meanings in symbolic terms, and the reordering of nature—the qualities of space and time—in new perceptual and material form. Art is an end in itself; its values are intrinsic. Technology is the instrumental ordering of human experience within a logic of efficient means, and the diremption of nature to use its powers for material gain. But art and technology are not separate realms walled off from each other. Art employs *techne,* but for its own ends. *Techne,* too, is a form of art that bridges culture and social structure, and in the process reshapes both.

This is to see technology in its essence. But one may understand it better, perhaps, by looking at the dimensions of its existence. For my present purposes, I will specify five dimensions in order to see how technology transforms both culture and social structure.

1. *Function.* Technology begins with an aesthetic idea: that the shape and structure of an object—a building, a vehicle, a machine—are dictated by its function. Nature is a guide only to the extent that it is efficient. Design and form are no longer ends in themselves. Tradition is no justification for the repetition of designs. Form is not the unfolding of an immanent aesthetic logic—like the musical forms of the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. There is no dialogue with the past. It is no accident that the adherents of a machine aesthetic in the early twentieth century, in Italy and Russia, flaunted the name Futurism.

2. *Energy.* Technology is the replacement of natural sources of power by created power beyond all past artistic imagination. Leonardo made designs for submarines and air conditioning machines, but he could not imagine any sources of power beyond what his eyes could behold: human muscles

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or animal strength, the power generated by wind and falling water. Visionaries of the seventeenth century talked grandiosely of mechanized agriculture, but their giant combines were to be driven by windmills and thus could not work. Energy drives objects—ships, cars, planes, lathes, machines—to speeds thousands of times faster than the winds, which were the limits of the "natural" imagination; creates light, heat and cold, extending the places where people can live and the time of the diurnal cycle; lifts weights to great heights, permitting the erection of scrapers of the skies and multiplying the densities of an area. The skyscraper lighted at night is as much the technological symbol of the modern city as the cathedral was the emblem of medieval religious life.

3. *Fabrication.* In its oldest terms, technology is the craft or scientific knowledge that specifies ways of doing things in a reproducible manner. The replication of items from templates or dies is an ancient art; its most common example is coinage. It is the essence of technology that its reproduction is much cheaper than its invention or development, owing to the standardization of skills and objects. Modern technological fabrication introduces two different factors: the replacement of manual labor and artisan skills by programmed machines; and the incredible rapidity of reproduction—printing a million newspaper copies per night—which is the difference in scale.

4. *Communication and Control.* Just as no one before the eighteenth century could imagine the new kinds of energy to come, so, well into the nineteenth century, no one could imagine—even with the coding of messages into dots and dashes, in telegraphy—the locking of binary digits with electricity, or the amplification of ethereal waves, which has produced modern communication and control systems. With telephone, radio, television and satellite communication, one person can talk to another in any part of the globe, or one person can be seen by hundreds of millions of persons at the same moment. With programmed instructions—through the maze of circuits at nano-seconds speed—we have control mechanisms that switch trains, guide planes, run automated machinery, compute figures, process data, simulate the movement of the stars, and correct for error both human and machine. An odd phrase sums it up: these are all done in "real time."

5. *Algorithms.* Technology is clearly more than the physical manipulation of nature. There is an "intellectual technology" as well. An algorithm is a "decision rule," a judgment of one or another alternative course to be taken, under varying conditions, to solve a problem. In this sense we have technology whenever we can substitute algorithms for human judgment.

We have here a continuum with classical technology, but it has been transposed to a new qualitative level. Physical technology —the machine—replaced human power at the *manual* level of raw muscle power or finger dexterity or repetition of tasks; the new intellectual technology—embodied in a computer program, or a numerically controlled machine tool—substitutes algorithms for human *judgments,* where these can be formalized. To this extent, the new intellectual technology marks the last half of the twentieth century, as the machine was the symbol of the first half.

Beyond this is a larger dream, the formalization of a theory of choice through stochastic, probabilistic, and deterministic methods—the applied mathematics of Markov chains, Monte Carlo randomization, or the minimax propositions of game theory. If the computer is the "tool," then "decision theory" is its master. Just as Pascal sought to throw dice with God, or the physiocrats tried to draw a perfect grid to array all economic exchanges among men, so the decision theories and the new intellectual technology seek their own *tableau entier*—the compass of rationality itself.

We say knowingly that technology has transformed the world, and we feel, apprehensively, that we are on a steeply rising S curve of change, so that the historical transition to new levels of technological

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power all over the world creates a crisis of transformation. But it is not always clear what has been transformed. To say vaguely "our lives," or flashily that we are experiencing "future shock," is of little help in understanding the character of that transformation. Even the fashionable phrase "the acceleration in the pace of change" is not much use, for it rarely specifies change in *what*. If one thinks of inventions that change the character of daily life, it is not at all clear that our generation is experiencing "more" change (and how does one measure it?) than previous ones. As Mervyn Jones points out, "A man born in 1800 and dying in 1860 would have seen the coming of the railway, the steamship, the telegraph, gas lighting, factory-made clothing and furniture. A man born in 1860 and dying in 1920 would have seen the telephone, electric light, the car and the lorry, the aeroplane, radio and the cinema." Are television and the computer any more "shocking" in their impact on our lives than the inventions that changed the lives of our forebears?

Technology has transformed our lives in more radical, yet more subtle, forms than the marvelous "gadgets" that we can see. From a sociological point of view, the effects are twofold: changing the "axis" of economics, and increasing the interaction—and consequently the "moral density," to use Durkheim's phrase—among men. These two become the definition of "modernity."

For most of the thousands of years of human existence, the level of production dictated the level of consumption; in the shorthand of economics, *supply shaped demand*. The returns from nature were small, and, from any single unit of production—in almost all cases, land—they were also diminishing, so that after a period of time, men would either have to wait and let the forests and land lie fallow, to be replenished slowly by nature, or move on in search of new lands. Given the scarce returns, men fought all the more bitterly for their share, and the major means of amassing wealth were war and plunder. With technology, this situation was changed. One finds an increasing proportion of returns for a given effort—we call this productivity—and, more subtly, a shift in the axis of economics from supply to demand. What men now want begins to affect the levels of production and to dictate the different kinds of items to be produced. It is this change in emphasis from supply to demand that creates modern economics. In the social world, it creates an entirely new attitude toward the world, wealth and happiness. They become defined by the sharp rise in the standard of living of the masses of men in the world.

The second change is the breakdown of segmentation and the enlargement of the boundaries of society—the creation, in sociological terms, of the mass society. The mass society is not just a large society. Czarist Russia and Imperial China were large land-mass societies, but they were segmented; each village was much like any other, repeating within its bounds the same kind of social structure. Segmentation disappears not with the growth of population but with the increase in the degree of social intercourse or contact—or, more technically, the rate of interaction per unit of time between men. Physical density is the number of persons per unit of space. Sociological density is the number of connections among people at a given time. When the Constitution was first adopted, the population of the United States was 4 million, and New York City, then the capital, held a total of 30,000 persons. Today there are more than 200 million persons in the country, and the metropolitan areas within which people live and work commonly hold from 5 to 20 million persons. Yet the change in the country is not just the increase in numbers, but the quantum jump in interactions as well. If we compare the life of individuals at the turn of the nineteenth century with our own, and think of how many different individuals we meet (simply to speak to), how many individuals we know (those we encounter socially), and how many we know of (in order to recognize their names and be responsive to some

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comment about them), we can get some sense of the change in the scale of our lives.

This axial change in the character of social relations brings with it two contrary changes in the areas of work and ideas: differentiation in the social structure and syncretism in the culture.

In the social structure—the realm of the economy, occupations and the stratification system of the society—the increase in interaction (between persons, firms, cities, regions) leads inevitably to competition. In earlier times, with few resources and limited growth, such a zero-sum situation—in which one could gain only at the expense of the other—led to plunder and expropriation. But in an economic world where everybody can gain (albeit in differential amounts), competition gives way to differentiation and interdependence. "We can say," Durkheim remarked, "that the progress of the division of labor is in direct ratio to the moral or dynamic density of the society." The condition of efficiency, which is the basis of economic progress, is the growth of specialization and the narrower focusing of tasks and skills. In the area of works, intellectual and otherwise, man becomes a smaller and smaller part of a larger and larger whole. He becomes defined by his role.

In culture, the situation is remarkably reversed. In the traditional society the ideas one has, the beliefs one accepts, the arts one beholds are all confined within a bounded space. Modernity bursts the walls. Everything is now available, and Hindu mantras and Tantric mandalas, Japanese prints and African sculptures, Eskimo music and Indian ragas all jostle one another in "real time" within Western homes. Not since the age of Constantine has the world seen so many strange gods mingling in the meditative consciousness of the middle-class mind.

In principle, much of this is not new. What is distinctive is the change in scale. If any single principle dominates our life, it is that. All that we once knew, played out on the scale of the Greek polis, is now played out in the dimensions of the entire world. Scale creates two effects: One, it extends the range of control from a center of power. (What is Stalin, an unknown wit remarked, if not Genghis Khan with a telephone?) And two, when linear extension reaches certain thresholds, unsettling changes ensue. A university of fifty thousand students may bear the same name that university had thirty years before, with five thousand students, but it is no longer the same university. A change in quantity is a change in quality; a change in scale is a change in institutional form.

This principle was laid down more than three hundred and fifty years ago by Galileo, in the square-cube law. As something doubles in size, it will triple in volume; but then its shape will also be different. As the biologist D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson has pointed out:

> [Galileo] said that if we tried building ships, palaces or temples of enormous size, beams and bolts would cease to hold together; nor can Nature grow a tree nor construct an animal beyond a certain size while retaining the proportions and employing the materials which suffice in the case of a smaller structure. The thing will fall to pieces of its own weight unless we either change its relative proportions . . . or else we must find a new material, harder and stronger than was used before.

The major question that confronts the twenty-first century is the question of the limits of scale. The technological revolution, as I have indicated, consists in the availability of huge amounts of energy at cheaper costs, more control of the circumstances of production, and faster communication. Each development increased the effectiveness of the other two. All three factors increased the speed of performing large-scale operations. Yet as John von Neumann pointed out seventeen years ago:

> . . . throughout the development, increased speed did not so much shorten time requirements of processes as extend the areas of the earth affected by them. The reason is clear. Since most *time* scales are fixed by human reaction times, habits and other physiological and

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psychological processes, the effect of the increased speed of technological processes was to enlarge the *size* of units—political, organizational, economic, and cultural—affected by technological operations. That is, instead of performing the same operations as before in less time, now large-scale operations were performed in the same time. This important evolution has a natural limit, that of the earth's actual size. The limit is now being reached, or at least closely approached.

We first reached that limit in the geopolitical military sphere. In previous epochs, geography could provide an escape. Both Napoleon and Hitler became bogged down in the large landmass of Russia, although by 1940 even the larger countries of continental western Europe were inadequate as military units. Since 1945, and particularly with the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles with multiple warheads, space and distance offer no effective cover or retreat in any part of the earth. As von Neumann presciently observed in 1955, "The effectiveness of offensive weapons is such as to stultify all plausible defensive time scales." To recall an old phrase of Winston Churchill's, the equilibrium of power has become the balance of terror.

We are told that we will soon be reaching the limits of resources on a world scale. As a theorem, this is a tautology; as a practical fact, the time scale is elusive. The studies that have sounded the warning are faulty in their methodology. They take little account of economics and the principles of relative prices and substitutability. The resources that are available from untapped areas (for example, the ocean bottoms, the large land areas of the Amazon, central Asia, Siberia, western China, the Antarctic) are uncharted. The degree of technological innovation that allows us to substitute lighter and cheaper materials for heavy and cumbersome ones (for example, the role of semiconductors such as transistors in radios, television sets and computers)—the entire range of miniaturization—is an unknown factor. And yet the warning is useful. More than two-thirds of the world is in a preindustrial phase wherein sixty percent or more of the labor force in engaged in agriculture, timber, fishing or mining, games against nature whose returns inevitably diminish. These countries obviously want to industrialize in order to raise their standards of living. The question we must confront is whether our resources are sufficient for such a task, whether new technologies can provide a more economical way, or whether the new industrialization and standard of living must come from some redistribution of the wealth of the advanced industrial countries of the world.

It is possible that we are reaching that limit of scale in technological terms. In the last century, we have increased our speeds of communication by a factor of 10^7, our speeds of travel by 10^2, our speeds of computer operation by 10^6, and our energy resources by 10^3. But all exponential growth reaches an asymptote, the ceiling limit where it levels off. In terrestrial speed, there is a natural limit of 16,000 miles an hour, since any higher speed throws a vehicle out of the earth's orbit. With aircraft we are questioning whether we should go above supersonic speed because of the danger it might present to the earth's atmosphere or to human noise tolerance on the ground. In communication around the world, we have already approached, in telephonic, radio and television communication, "real time," and the technological problems are primarily those of expanding the number of bands of communication to permit more and more people to enjoy that use.

In a fundamental sense, the space-time framework of the *Oecumene*—the whole world—is now almost set. Transportation and communication bind the planet as closely today as they did the Greek polis of twenty-five hundred years ago. The major sociological problem created by that technology is what happens when all segmentation breaks down and a quantum jump in human interaction takes place. How will we manage when each and every part of the globe becomes accessible to every person? It was once suggested that 7×720 (5,040) citizens was the optimum

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size for the city-state. (If half a day per year is needed to maintain contact with a relatively good friend, there is a ceiling of 720 persons with whom we can have personal interaction.) Athens, the largest of the ancient Greek city-states, had, at the highest estimate, 40,000 male citizens, and a quorum in the Assembly was fixed at 6,000. The number of adult citizens in New Zealand is around 30 times that of Athens, in the Netherlands 100 times, in France 500, in the United States about 2,500, and in India, the largest representative democracy in the world, about 5 or 6,000 times. In the face of these numbers, what does participation mean? What is the character of human contact? What are the limits of human comprehension?

IV

WHAT IS SOCIETY? The rhetoric of apocalypse haunts our time. Given the recurrence of the Day of Wrath in the Western imagination—when the seven seals are opened and the seven vials pour forth—it may be that great acts of guilt provoke fears of retribution that are projected heavenward as mighty punishments of men. A little more than a decade ago we had the apocalyptic specter (whose reality content was indeed frightening) of a nuclear holocaust, and there was a flood of predictions that before the end of the decade a nuclear war was a statistical certainty. That apocalyptic prophecy has receded, and other guilts produce other fears. Today it is the ecological crisis, and we find, like the drum roll of Revelation 14-16 recording the plagues: *The Doomsday Book, Terracide, Our Plundered Planet, The Chasm Ahead, The Hungry Planet,* and so on.[8]

In the demonology of the time, "the great whore" is technology. It has profaned Mother Nature, it has stripped away the mysteries, it has substituted for the natural environment an artificial environment in which man cannot feel at home.[9] The modern heresy, in the thinking of Jacques Ellul, the French social philosopher, whose writing has been the strongest influence on this school of thought, has been to enshrine *la technique* as the ruling principle of society.

Ellul defines technique as:

> . . . the translation into action of man's concern to master things by means of reason, to account for what is subconscious, make quantitative what is qualitative, make clear and precise the outlines of nature, take hold of chaos and put order into it.

Technique, by its power, takes over the government:

> Theoretically our politicians are at the center of the machinery, but actually they are being progressively eliminated by it. Our statesmen are important satellites of the machine, which, with all its parts and techniques, apparently functions as well without them.

Technique is a new morality that "has placed itself beyond good and evil and has such power and autonomy [that] it in turn has become the judge of what is moral, the creator of a new morality." We have here a new demiurge, an "unnatural" and "blind" logos that in the end enslaves man himself:

> When technique enters into the realm of social life, it collides ceaselessly with the human being. . . . Technique requires predictability and, no less, exactness of prediction. It is necessary, then, that technique prevail over the human being. For technique, this is a matter of life and death. Technique must reduce man to a technical animal, the king of the slaves of technique.[10]

Ellul has painted a reified world in which *la technique* is endowed with anthropomorphic and demonological attributes. (Milton's Satan, someone remarked, is Prometheus with Christian theology.) Many of the criticisms of technology today remind one of Goethe, who rejected Newton's optics on the ground that the microscope and telescope distorted the human scale and confused the mind. The point is well taken, if there is confusion of realms. What the eye can see unaided, and must respond to, is different from the microcosm below and the macrocosm beyond. Necessary distinctions have to be

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maintained. The difficulty today is that it is the critics of technology who absolutize the dilemmas and have no answers, short of the apocalyptic solutions that sound like the familiar comedy routine—stop the world, I want to get off.

Against such cosmic anguish one feels almost apologetic for mundane answers. But after the existentialist spasm, there remain the dull and unyielding problems of ordinary daily life. The point is that technology, or technique, does not have a life of its own. There is no immanent logic of technology, no "imperative" that must be obeyed. Ellul has written: "Technique is a means with a set of rules for the game. . . . There is but one method for its use, one possibility." But this is patently not so if one distinguishes between technology and the social "support system" in which it is embedded.

The automobile and the highway network form a technological system; the way this system is used is a question of social organization. We can have a social system that emphasizes private use of the automobile; money is then spent to provide parking and other facilities necessary to that purpose. On the other hand, arguing that an automobile is a capital expenditure whose "downtime" is quite large, and that twenty feet of street space for a single person in one vehicle is a large social waste, we could penalize private auto use and have only a rental and taxi system that would substantially reduce the necessary number of cars. The same technology is compatible with a variety of social organizations, and we choose the one we want to use.

One should also distinguish between technology and the accounting system that allocates costs. Until recently the social costs generated by different technologies have not been borne by individuals or firms responsible for them, because the criterion of social accountability was not used. Today that is changing. The technology of the internal-combustion engine is being modified because the government now insists that the pollution it generates be reduced. And the technology is being changed. The so-called energy crisis we face is not a physical shortage but the result of new demands by socially minded individuals for a different kind of technological use of fuels. If we could burn the high-sulphur fuels used until a few years ago, there would be no energy crisis; but there would be more pollution. Here, too, the problem is one of costs and choice.

The source of our predicament is not the "imperatives" of technology but a lack of decision mechanisms for choosing the kinds of technology and social support patterns we want. The venerated teacher of philosophy at City College, Morris Raphael Cohen, used to pose a question to his students in moral philosophy: If a Moloch God were to offer the human race an invention that would enormously increase each individual's freedom and mobility, but demanded the human sacrifice of thirty thousand lives (the going price at the time), would you take it? That invention, of course, was the automobile. But we had no mechanisms for assessing its effects and planning for the control of its use. Two hundred years ago, no one "voted" for our present industrial system, as men voted for a polity or a constitution. To this extent, the phrase "the industrial revolution" is deceptive, for there was no single moment when people could decide, as they did politically in 1789 or 1793 or 1917, for or against the new system. And yet today, with our increased awareness of alternatives and consequences, we are beginning to make those choices. We can do this by technology assessment, and by social policy that either penalizes or encourages a technological development (for example, the kind of energy we use) through the mechanism of taxes and subsidy.

A good deal of our intellectual difficulty stems from the way we conceive of society. Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of modern sociology, contributed to this difficulty by saying that society exists *sui generis,* meaning that it could not be reduced to psychological factors. In a crucial sense he was right, but in his formulation he pictured society as a reified

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entity, a collective conscience outside the individual, acting as an external constraint on his behavior. And this lent itself to the romantic dualism of the individual versus society.

Society is *sui generis,* a level of complex organizations created by the degree of interdependence and the multiplicity of ties among men. A traffic jam, as Thomas Schelling has pointed out, is best analyzed not in terms of the individual pathologies of the drivers, but by considering the layout of roads, the pattern of flow into and out of the city, the congestion of particular times because of work scheduling, and so on. But society is not some external artifact, *but a set of social arrangements, created by men,* to regulate normatively the exchange of wants and satisfactions.

The order of society differs from the order of nature. Nature is "out there," without *telos,* and men must discern its binding and constraining laws to refit the world. Society is a moral order, defined by consciousness and purpose, and justified by its ability to satisfy men's needs, material and transcendental. Society is a design that, as men become more and more conscious of its consequences and effects, is subject to reordering and rearrangement in the effort to solve its quandaries. It is a social contract, made not in the past but in the present, in which the constructed rules are obeyed if they seem fair and just.

The problems of modern society arise from its increasing complexity and interdependence—the multiplication of interaction and the spread of syncretism—as old segmentations break down and new arrangements are needed. The resolution of the problem is twofold: to create political and administrative structures that are responsive to the new scales, and to develop a more comprehensive and coherent creed that diverse men can share. The prescription is easy. It is the exegesis that is difficult.

V

THE RESOLUTION OF REALMS. I return to my original question: is the evident expansion of man's powers a measure of progress; and how do we talk to the Greeks and they to us? I began this discussion with the myth as told by Protagoras, but I did not finish it then, and we now return to it.

Following the theft of fire, "man had a share in the portion of the Gods." But he soon found that *techne* does not create civilized life. When men gathered in communities, they injured one another for want of political skill. As Protagoras recounts it:

> Zeus therefore, fearing the total destruction of our race, sent Hermes to impart to men the qualities of respect for others and a sense of justice, so as to bring order into our cities and create a bond of friendship and union.
>
> Hermes asked Zeus in what manner he was to bestow these gifts on men. "Shall I distribute them as the arts were distributed—that is, on the principle that one trained doctor suffices for many laymen, and so with the other experts? Shall I distribute justice and respect for their fellows in this way, or to all alike?"
>
> "To all," said Zeus. "Let all have their share. There could never be cities if only a few shared in these virtues, as in the arts. Moreover, you must lay it down as my law that if anyone is incapable of acquiring his share of these two virtues he shall be put to death as a plague to the city."

What we have here, in Homer's terms, is the contrast between *techne* and *themis. Techne* enables us to conquer nature; it is essential to the *economic* life. But *themis,* the marriage of conscience and honorable conduct, is the principle of civilized life. "*Themis,*" as James Redfield puts it, "is the characteristic human good, and man is distinguished from the feral savage by his ability to live in a society." In Homer, *themis* is primary, and *techne* secondary.

Hegel interpreted Plato's myths as representing a necessary stage in the education of the human race—the childhood phase—which conceptual knowledge could discard as soon as philosophy had grown up. But it should be clear by now that the image of childhood, as used by Hegel and Marx, is meaningless. We are not much ahead of the Greeks in the formulation of our

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problems or in our wisdom for solving them. In what sense, then, are we alike, and in what sense different?

Society, I would say, should be regarded as having three analytically distinct dimensions—the culture, the polity and the social structure—each characterized by a different axial principle and each possessing a different historical rhythm.

Culture embraces the areas of expressive symbolism (painting, poetry, fiction), which seek to explore these meanings in imaginative form; the codes of guidance for behavior, which spell out the limits, prescriptive and prohibitive, of moral conduct; and the character structure of individuals as they integrate these dimensions in their daily lives. But the themes of culture are the existential questions that face all human beings at all times in the consciousness of history—how one meets death, the nature of loyalty and obligation, the character of tragedy, the definition of heroism, the redemptiveness of love—and there is a principle of limited possibilities in the modes of response. The principle of culture, thus, is a *ricorso,* returning, not in its forms but in its concerns, to the same essential modalities that represent the finitude of human existence.

The polity, which is the regulation of conflict under the constitutive principle of justice, involves the different forms of authority by which men seek to rule themselves: oligarchy and democracy, elite and mass, centralization and decentralization, rule and consent. The polity is *mimesis,* in which the forms are known and men choose those appropriate to their times.

The social structure—the realm of the economy, technology and occupational system—is *epigenetic.* It is linear, cumulative and quantitative, for there are specific rules for the process of growth and differentiation.

To the extent that man becomes more and more independent of nature, he can choose and construct the kind of society he wants. Yet he is constrained by the axial facts that each societal realm has a different rhythm of change, and not all forms are compatible with one another. It is, in fact, the radical disjunction between the contemporary social structure, with its dependence on functional rationality, and the modernist culture, with its radical emphasis on the antinomian self, which may well be the root of the much vaunted crisis of the times. But that, too, is part of the other story.

If one asks, then, in what ways we have advanced beyond the Greeks, we know that our perception of the earth has changed, for we have both speed and the view from the air, which the Greeks never knew. And in the power to transform nature and extend the range of man's political life, we live on a scale they would not have been able to understand. Our social structures, then, are vastly different, transformed as they are by technology. Our polities resemble each other in their predicaments (one has only to read Thucydides to be struck by the resemblances) but the problems today are greatly distended by the influence of numbers of persons and the simultaneity of issues. Yet when we read the major chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone*—"Wonders are many," ending with the antistrophe "the craft of his engines has passed his dream/ In haste to the good or evil goal"—we know that, with all the celebration of man's powers to navigate the seas and to domesticate the earth, man without justice and righteousness ("no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin") is his own enemy, and that we are all, over the span of the millennia, human, all too human.

CODA

In the *ricorsi* of human existence, there have been recurrent cycles of optimism and despair. In the Greek world one finds Hesiod regarding society as corrupt, nature as recalcitrant, and history as regressive, since the golden age lay in the past. For Pericles, some centuries later, society is open, nature is malleable, and history is progressive. But by the end of that century, by the time of Euripides, society is seen as a weak illusion, nature a harsh reality, and history as meaningless.

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The modern world has had its own cycles. At the dawn of modernity, Rousseau saw society as repressive, nature as good, and history as an illusion. Less than a hundred years later, Comte saw society as open, nature as malleable, and history as progressive. Today the cultural pessimists see society as a monster, nature as recalcitrant, and history as apocalyptic. Is this to be an endless recurrence?

The history of consciousness suggests a resolution. The uniqueness of man lies in his capacity for self-consciousness and self-transcendence, to stand continually "outside" himself and to judge himself. This is the foundation of human freedom. It is this radical freedom that defines the glory and the plight of man. The modern view of man takes over only the aspect of freedom, not his finitude. It sees man as a creature of infinite power able to bend the world to his own will. Nothing is unknowable, Comte declared. Prometheus is my hero, Marx declared. Man can make himself, modern humanist psychology declares. It is man's incorrigible tendency toward self-aggrandizement, self-infinitization and self-idolization that, in the political religions, becomes a moralizing absolute and, owing to the intrinsic egoism of human nature, masks a will to power.

Modern culture, particularly in its utopian versions, denies the Biblical idea of sin. Sin derives from the fact that man as a limited and finite creature denies his finiteness and seeks to reach beyond it—beyond culture, beyond nature, beyond history. Evil, as Reinhold Niebuhr has put it, does not exist in nature, but in human history: ". . . human freedom breaks the limit of nature, upsetting its limited harmonies and giving a demonic dimension to its conflicts. There is therefore progress in human history; but it is a progress of all human potencies, both for good and evil."

Thus there is a dual aspect to man as he stands recurrently at the juncture of nature and history. As a creature of nature, he is subject to its brutal contingencies; as a self-conscious spirit he can stand outside both nature and history and strive to establish his own freedom, to control the direction of his fate. But human freedom is a paradox. Man is limited, subject to causal necessity, and bound to finite conditions; yet because of his imagination he is free to choose his own future and be responsible for his own actions. He is able to step over his own finiteness, yet that very step itself risks sin because of the temptations of idolatry. That is the contradiction between finitude and freedom. That is the quandary of human existence.

NOTES

1 "Human history may be viewed as a process in which new needs are created as a result of material changes instituted to fulfill the old. According to Marx . . . the changes in the character and quality of human needs, including the means of gratifying them, is the keystone not merely to historical change but to the changes of human nature." Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 277.

2 As *Webster's Second* points out: "The conception of *nature* (Gr. *physis*, L. *natura*) has been confused by the mingling of three chief meanings adopted with the word into English, viz. (1) Creative or vital force. (2) Created being in its essential character; kind; sort. (3) Creation as a whole, esp. the physical universe. The main ambiguity is between *nature* as active or creative and *nature* as passive or created. In the original animistic view, the active vitalistic conception prevailed; but Plato sharply distinguished the passive material from the active formal element, and Aristotle continued the distinction in the conception of a moving cause, or God, as separate from the moved physical universe, or Nature. This antithesis is all but obliterated in pantheistic and naturalistic views. It appears in the pantheism of Spinoza, but the distinction of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* serves only to discriminate two elements or aspects of the one organic being or substance. The two elements, in the forms of matter and energy, are retained in the modern physical or mechanical view, wherein nature appears as a material universe acting according to rules, but to all intents independent of God or purposive cause."

3 If nature is outside man, what does one do with the term *human nature*? Despite its ambiguities, it is probably indispensable. Yet, in the attempt to keep my distinctions clear, I would use instead the term *human character*.

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[4] I realize that I am using the phrase "the history of nature" in a very different way from such physicists (or should one call him a natural philosopher?) as C. F. von Weizsäcker, who asserts that nature is historic, if by history one means being *within* time, since all of nature itself is changing—and ten billion years ago there was neither sun nor earth nor any of the stars we know—and that, following the theorem of the second law of thermodynamics, events in nature are fundamentally irreversible and incapable of repetition. My history of nature, here, is within the time-frame and conceptual map of nature's transformation at the hands of man, and the understanding of nature by man. See C. F. von Weizsäcker, *The History of Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[5] One might take this as an illustration of the range of interest of the man of letters before the two cultures. As Franklin Ford observed even of culture a century later:

"Through most of the eighteenth century, a truly learned man, wherever his most highly developed competence might lie, claimed and was conceded the right to move with interest and confidence over a range which we should now describe as covering physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. What was Montesquieu—political scientist, sociologist, historian, aesthetic philosopher, critic of morals? Before selecting a label, we might reflect that his earliest scholarly prize was won with a paper concerning nervous and muscular reactions observed in the thawing of a frozen sheep's tongue." ("Culture and Communication," unpublished paper for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Conference on Science and Culture, May 10-11, 1963.)

[6] As Charles Gillespie has written: "His was the philosophy that inspired science as an activity, a movement carried on in public and of concern to the public. This aspect of science scarcely existed before the seventeenth century. . . . This is comfortable democratic doctrine, and it is obvious why Baconianism has always held a special appeal as the way of science in societies which develop a vocation for the betterment of man's estate, and which confide not in aristocracies, whether of birth or brains, but in a wisdom to be elicited from common pursuits—in seventeenth-century England, in eighteenth-century France, in nineteenth-century America, amongst Marxists of all countries." *The Edge of Objectivity* (Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 75.

[7] Can there ever be an end to scarcity? What is striking is that Marx, like all nineteenth-century thinkers, conceives of abundance as a plethora of goods. But in contemporary society there are many new—and crucial—kinds of scarcity which were never envisaged, notably the scarcity of time. And if we think of abundance, as an economist does, as items being a "free good" (that is, having zero cost as air once had), then one finds in contemporary society the costs of information and coordination of activities as rising, and therefore becoming increasingly a scarce resource. For an elaboration of this argument, see the section, "The End of Scarcity?" in my book, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (Basic Books, New York, 1973).

[8] The temper is not restricted to ecologists. Alfred Kazin cites the titles of some recent cultural-social analyses of "our situation": *Reflections on a Sinking Ship; Waiting for the End; The Fire Next Time; The Economy of Death; The Sense of an Ending; On the Edge of History; Thinking About the Unthinkable.*

[9] Theodore Roszak, for example, writes:

". . . we must not ignore the fact that there *is* a natural environment—the world of wind and wave, beast and flower, sun and stars—and that preindustrial people lived for millennia in close company with that world, striving to harmonize the things and thoughts of their own making with its non-human forces. Circadian and seasonal rhythms were the first clock people knew, and it was by coordinating these fluid organic cycles with their own physiological tempos that they timed their activities. What they ate, they had killed or cultivated with their own hands, staining them with the blood or dirt of the effort. They learned from the flora and fauna of their surroundings, conversed with them, worshipped them, and sacrificed to them. They were convinced that their fate was bound up intimately with these non-human friends and foes, and in their culture they made place for them, honoring their ways."

What is striking in this projection of a pagan idyll is the complete neglect of the diseases that wasted most "natural" men, the high infant mortality, the painful, frequent childbirth that debilitated the women, the recurrent shortages of food, and the inadequacies of shelter that made life nasty, brutish and short.

[10] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York, 1964), Chapter II, *passim*. What is striking in this scathing attack on technique is Ellul's omission of any discussion of nature, or how man must live without technique. (The word *nature* does not appear in the index, and there are only a few passing references to the natural world, for example, p. 79.) As Ellul's translator, John Wilkinson, writes in the introduction: "In view of the fact that Ellul continually apostrophizes technique as 'unnatural' (except when he calls it the 'new nature'), it might be thought surprising that he has no fixed conception of nature or the natural. The best answer seems to be that he considers 'natural' (in the good sense) *any* environment able to satisfy man's material needs, *if* it leaves him free to use it as a means to achieve his individual internally generated ends."

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The Carpenter's Daughter Speaks

KATHLEEN ELLEN JENNINGS

In my father's basement
is a cradle disguised

as planks of wood; inside
those strips of tree flank

hides the cradle I'll
rock my baby in when

I get him. The seasons
press motifs against

the glass: first ferns,
then steam; dead leaves,

now frost. Small living
creatures sniff frozen

dirt. My father's hands
are idle, mine empty: no

one has wings, we go no
-where near the sun. Grief's

longer than I dreamed,
stronger and deeper. In

winter's basement wood
warps while we wait.

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Science and the Death of God

PAUL A. CARTER

THE QUESTION "IS GOD DEAD?" is a more venerable one than some who have asked it during the past decade have been aware. Many centuries ago, the Psalmist declared: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." The pioneer philosopher of science Lucretius—no fool—acknowledged that there might indeed be gods out there somewhere, serene and indifferent, but he had no patience with those persons who "supposed that the gods designed all things for the sake of men." In contrast to the theist's grand claim that in the beginning God by an act of will created the heavens and the earth, the sturdy Roman aristocrat proposed an evolutionary view almost deliberately ugly in its naturalism: "Thus then the ponderous mass of earth was formed with close-cohering body and all the slime of the world so to speak slid down by its weight to the lowest point and settled at the bottom like dregs."

Constantine, Saint Augustine, and the Middle Ages (to telescope a great deal of Western history) are commonly supposed to have put a stop to all such impieties, but as the Middle Ages waned, the old heterodoxies surfaced again. John Herman Randall, in his widely used textbook *The Making of the Modern Mind,* suggested that the first "modern" symptoms of God's fatal illness may have been diagnosed in the fifteenth century by the sometime Dominican friar Giordano Bruno, who revived the Lucretian concept of infinite space and thereby broke open the tidy cosmopolis in which God and man had previously dwelt together. By the time of the Copernican and Cartesian revolutions, Randall intimated, the God whom medieval man had worshipped was indeed mortally stricken:

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Throughout the whole vast windy stretches of infinity, in stone and plant and animal, nowhere in this universe was there another being like man, nowhere a being who felt and suffered, loved and feared and hoped, who thought and knew. Man was alone, quite alone, in a vast and complex cosmic machine. . . . Of all that medieval world, one thing alone was left . . . the faith in a Creator in whose image man was made, in a wise and loving Father who had built all this vast machinery for the good of man.

By the seventeenth century even that last bastion was under siege. Quoting (perhaps too selectively) from Spinoza, Randall concluded: "Gone is the wise and loving Father, to whom man can appeal in prayer; irretrievably gone is the great Friend behind the world who cares."

That this Father and Friend was irretrievably gone was not equally clear to all of his sons. The generations that followed Spinoza's, who heard the atheist polemics of d'Holbach and the anticlerical strictures of Voltaire, knew also the warm consolations of German pietism and of Wesleyan Methodism. According to Randall, it was left for the nineteenth century to finish off the "fond remnant of the Christian epic." The century of Darwin, who seemed to reduce man's soul to the caperings of a naked ape, and of Wundt, who seemed to reduce it to a series of electrochemical discharges inside man's skull, heard from Nietzsche the very words the mass media seem to think were first spoken only yesterday: "God is dead." "It has been the great effort of the time to establish a mathematical equation between an instructed mind and an abandoned faith," wrote the best-selling American religious novelist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps in 1886. "We learned that we were not men, but protoplasm. We learned that we were not spirits, but chemical combinations. . . . We learned that the drama of Hamlet and the Ode to Immortality were secretions of the gray matter of the brain."

"Harmonizers" of science with religion were on the scene also, to be sure. In the eighties, on Sunday evenings in the Old Chapel at Yale, Professor James Dwight Dana told the students that the theory of evolution did not overthrow the story of creation as found in the first chapter of Genesis, "except perhaps in one or

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two details." The college pastor listened with approval and then dismissed the congregation with a scientific benediction: "You see, gentlemen, that when the right kind of a man of science and the right kind of a theologian come together there is no dispute between science and religion." The trouble with this kind of "peaceful coexistence" proposal, however, was that the scientists, and especially the publicists and popularizers of science, would not let the theologians alone. When one clergyman denied in 1876 that there was any conflict between "true" science and "true" religion, Edward L. Youmans, crusading editor of the *Popular Science Monthly,* replied that the clash was "natural and inevitable . . . because science is driving on . . . regardless of anything but the truth it aims to teach, while the religious world is full of anxiety and dread about what is going to happen as a result."

From a different perspective, Friedrich Engels came to the same conclusion. "In the history of modern natural science," Engels wrote in the *Dialectics of Nature,*

> God is treated by his defenders as Frederick-William III was treated by his generals and officials in the Jena campaign. One division of the army after another lays down its arms, one fortress after another capitulates before the march of science, until at last the whole infinite realm of nature is conquered . . . and there is no place left in it for the Creator.

Moreover, from a Marxist point of view the "harmonizers" of religion with science were no better than the out-and-out reactionaries. "God is nowhere treated worse than by the natural scientists who believe in him," Engels gibed, tracing the humiliating retreats of God's defenders from Newton to "his last great Don Quixote, Agassiz," and ending with Tyndall, who "forbids Him any entry into nature and relegates Him to the world of emotional processes, only admitting Him because, after all, there must be somebody who knows more about all these things (nature) than John Tyndall!"

In wider circles, beyond the special audience of the *Popular Science Monthly* and outside the special outlook of Marxism, crusaders against God may have received a more respectful hearing

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then than they have in the twentieth century. During those Victorian years "the Great Infidel," Robert G. Ingersoll, was denouncing the Bible with humor and passion: "They may say I will be damned if I do not believe that, and I tell them I will if I do." In 1876, Ingersoll took time out from his freethinking evangel to deliver the nominating speech for James G. Blaine at the Republican National Convention. It is difficult to imagine so avowed a religious radical placing a serious presidential contender's name in nomination at a major-party convention held in the Roaring Twenties, or even in the Swinging Sixties. Again, that staunch evangelical William E. Gladstone took time out from his politicking to refute the Biblical heterodoxies of T. H. Huxley; I doubt that Richard Nixon during his out-of-office years would have considered the "God-is-dead" theologians dangerous enough to have penned twenty-page tracts against them.

To be sure, in some quarters the churches were marching on from strength to strength. If Robert Ingersoll packed in the crowds, so did Dwight L. Moody; if writers for Youmans's *Popular Science Monthly* urged that we cleanse ourselves from "the leprosy of the miraculous which taints men's minds," Mary Baker Eddy championed the miraculous in a startling new way. Martin Marty has called our attention to "the extent of the evangelical triumph" in post–Civil War America, particularly by contrast with Europe: "Wherever one turned, signs of progress, growth, and success could be documented. . . . All these signs were impressive to partisans of Christianity and seemed oppressive and overpowering to its antagonists." Foes of organized religion who claimed that millions of Americans privately agreed with them may therefore have been indulging in wishful thinking. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," Charles Dickens wisely observed when writing of another strife-torn period. Speaking specifically of America's Gilded Age, William R. Hutchison has suggested that "the culture as usual was getting more religious and more secular at the same time. . . . Faith was both growing and declining," and the historian's problem is to figure out the special form for that age of "our perennial paradox."

In *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* I argued that there

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were in fact special elements in the American (and British) religious situation a century ago, such that the question "Is God dead?" may have been asked then in a far more searching way than was possible in the 1920s or even in the 1960s. For example, in our own century conflict of this kind has sometimes been muffled by relativism: you may be right, I could be wrong, so if you don't criticize my faith, I won't find fault with yours. In his more genial moods even H. L. Mencken sometimes masked his basic hostility to religion by a kind of personal tact: "We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart." But much of nineteenth-century thought was still monistic, both philosophically and morally; truth, whether conceived of religiously or irreligiously, was *truth,* and its defender was obligated to combat the purveyor of falsehood, come what may. Just as the evangelist urgently felt the duty of asking anyone he met, "Have you been saved?" rather than tactfully letting him go his own way, so also a counter-evangelist like Ingersoll quite naturally carried his fight into the enemy camp: "The agnostic does not simply say, 'I do not know.' He goes another step, and he says, with great emphasis, that you do not know." Paradoxically—as Bertrand Russell's great essay "A Free Man's Worship" was to make clear—the rejection of traditional religion had itself become "religious."

Another complication in the conflict between "knowledge" and faith during America's Gilded Age (or in England's Victorian Age) was the period's notorious literalism: "Facts, facts, facts!" cried Mr. Gradgrind on the opening page of Dickens's *Hard Times.* In his essay "The Place of Science in Modern Civilization," Thorstein Veblen would argue in 1906 that the culture of modernity had become "peculiarly matter of fact"; it was, to use Veblen's arresting adjective, *opaque.* The growing body of impersonal factual knowledge plus the insensate discipline of the machine increasingly gave industrial man a world view in which intangible reality had no place. Three decades earlier, the Anglo-Catholic apologist James DeKoven anticipated the reasoning of the great Norwegian-American renegade. "The visible encroaches on the invisible," DeKoven confessed in 1878. "Between us and God

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appear to come laws, and forces, and powers, the duration and extent of which we can grasp and measure. . . . What, then, if these laws begin to take to us the place of God?" In his Lowell Lectures of 1894 the British scientist and evangelist Henry Drummond put the question into a still more troublesome form: "If God is only to be left to the gaps in our knowledge, where shall we be when these gaps are filled up? And if they are never to be filled up, is God only to be found in the disorders of the world?"

It gave no relief to such inquirers that in the coming century philosophy was destined to become less monistic and science less literalist, even though some of them had already realized that the palpable material world upon which their science seemed to rest was not quite a "fact" in Mr. Gradgrind's sense of that word. Noting as early as 1873 the overthrow of what had been classic textbook distinctions between "substances" that could be weighed, and more imponderable "substances" such as light, electricity and magnetism, E. A. Sears, a contributor to the Methodist *Christian Advocate,* wrote: "Matter has no ultimate units, but is divisible to the point where it vanishes from human perception"—not a bad description of what goes on in a particle accelerator. Nevertheless, the notion that one must perforce choose between "fact," which is demonstrably true, and "fiction," which is by definition false, dies hard. In this particular area the typical churchman, no matter how learned, was just another unspecialized layman, and—usually —his unchurched opponent was no less an amateur. One reason for the sterility and thinness of much "modernist" Protestant thinking in the twentieth century is that these men who prided themselves on being up to date were continuing perforce to live off the intellectual capital of the Gilded Age.

They were not always aware that that was what they were doing. In any era, the young who categorically reject all the crimes and follies of their elders quite unknowingly use many weapons that were forged in the arsenals of other elders. Never was this more true than in the decade of the twenties, with its strange polarity between nostalgia for "normalcy" and hunger for novelty, and as a result much of the detail of the science-versus-religion debate in that period has quite properly been forgotten. Those

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more familiar with their elders' deeds than most of their own generation, however—men like John Herman Randall, for example, whose *Making of the Modern Mind* was published in 1926—were capable of producing "tracts for the times" that retain a certain timelessness to this day.

They preached their gospel in an age when religion, at the popular level, was more obviously on the defensive than it had been during the Gilded Age. The upward statistical march of the churches ever since the federal census of 1790 took a sharp downward turn; mainstream WASP denominations showed an actual net membership decline. Robert T. Handy has aptly and convincingly characterized the decade from 1925 to 1935 as "The American Religious Depression," and Philip Gibbs's novel *The Age of Reason* (1928) strongly implied a British equivalent. If skeptics and iconoclasts did not go about nominating presidential candidates, they churned out a spate of books whose volume and readership were impressive. A short span of months between 1929 and 1930 saw the publication, for example, of *A Preface to Morals,* by Walter Lippmann; *The Twilight of Christianity,* a thoroughgoing positivistic tract by Harry Elmer Barnes; *The Modern Temper,* by Joseph Wood Krutch; *Treatise on the Gods,* a typical foray by H. L. Mencken; and, from within the religious camp itself, *Theism and the Modern Mood* by the Protestant theologian Walter Marshall Horton, who confessed to his own personal theistic creed but conceded that in general, at the time he was writing, "the fact of a decline of faith in God seems undeniable."

Horton blamed the situation to a great extent on the First World War:

> Before the war, we found it easy to believe in a smiling and benignant Providence, rolling on the chariot of Progress from victory to victory, and from bliss to bliss. During the war, we read our Hebrew prophets, and with a sense of tragic exaltation looked out upon a world where a stern but righteous Providence was bringing down a well-earned retribution upon the heads of the wicked. Since the war, we prefer to take our history naturalistically, in the mood of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. . . . We are inclined to turn savagely upon anyone who tries,

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after the great fiasco of the war, once more to "justify the ways of God to men."

This is an argument that many ethically sensitive persons continue to find persuasive. In the middle of our century an even more world-convulsing conflict would lead the American Jewish theologian Richard L. Rubenstein to argue that after Auschwitz, the God who must be affirmed "in order to remain faithful to both tradition and contemporary Jewish experience" would have to be "a willful, cosmic sadist who repays the love offered by his tortured believers with criminally obscene 'punishments'." Yet ancient Assyria's national policy, as destructive in its own way as that of modern Nazi Germany—and as effective, in that at one stroke it cut the twelve tribes of ancient Israel down to two!—had not prevented the rise of Israel's prophetic theist tradition in the first place. On the Protestant side represented by men like Walter Horton, it should similarly be noted that the confessions of the Reformers were first made in the midst of frightful wars of annihilation, culminating in a Thirty Years' War that is said to have left the population of Germany reduced by two-thirds. Although we must take full account of what H. G. Wells called simply "the international catastrophe of 1914" as a causal explanation for the spiritual *malaise* of the twenties, we must also raise again the question of theistic religion's inherent credibility, a question that can be asked both in the best of times and in the worst.

But at once a major obstacle arises for anyone who would ask that question seriously: the scientific and philosophic issues so searchingly aired in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have in the twentieth become difficult, at times even impossible, for nonscientists to discuss. J. Robert Oppenheimer, in one of his last published essays, speculated as to "why the views of Copernicus, the discoveries of Galileo, the understanding and syntheses of Newton, should so greatly have resonated throughout European society, so greatly altered the words with which men spoke of themselves and their destiny," whereas the same can hardly be said of the views of Niels Bohr, the discoveries of

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Heisenberg, or the understanding and syntheses of Einstein. Oppenheimer's answer was that the errors revealed by physics and mathematics and astronomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been "errors common to the thought, the doctrine, the very form and hope of European culture"; therefore, "when they were revealed, the thought of Europe was altered." In contrast, "the errors that relativity and quantum theory have corrected were physicists' errors, shared a little, of course, by our colleagues in related subjects." Appalling as have been some of the practical consequences of those corrections, such as the hydrogen bomb, the concrete demonstration over Hiroshima of the validity of $e = mc^2$ did not carry with it also a demonstration of how man's intellectual conception of the universe had been altered by relativity—a word that the unspecialized theistic apologist often confuses with "relativism." Much the same observation can be made of evolutionary theory, whose reception had been such a traumatic experience for the nineteenth century; Oppenheimer pointed out the stark "contrast between the impact of the views of Darwin, and the almost total lack of general interest in Mendel's discovery of binomial coefficients in the populations of succeeding generations of peas."

Was God's fatal illness, then, so elusive to diagnose that the theologians, trapped on the wrong side of Sir Charles Snow's "two cultures," were unable to proclaim the death of God until after the event had occurred? Or—as many theologians and some scientists insisted—were the findings of Einstein and Bohr *less* lethal to traditional religious belief than the findings of Darwin at first had seemed? When the theist hesitantly attempted to appropriate the new science for his own purposes, the antitheist was quick to scout any such argument. "Don't let the Einstein-twisters catch you here!" with their assumption "that the discovery of the identity of matter and energy breaks down eighteenth-century materialism and reopens the way for mystical myth-making," Howard Phillips Lovecraft wrote in 1929:

> What these feeble-minded theists are howling about as a sudden victory for themselves is really the materialist's trump card. . . . Matter indeed

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has been shown to be a passing phase of energy . . . but what is this save a perfect confirmation of the basic essentials of Haeckelian monism? Thus the materialist, now using that title in an historical sense only, emerges strengthened in his position as an atheistical (or agnostic) monist. He has sounded space a little deeper, and found . . . simply a profounder disintegration, and a profounder mechanistic impersonality.

Surely in 1929, the writer concluded, God was dead—or at best, as for Lucretius, inaccessible: "Here are we," Lovecraft continued, "and yonder yawns the universe. If there be indeed any central governor, any set of standards, or any final goal, we can never hope to get even the faintest inkling of any of these things."

But as evidence for this sweepingly negative credo, Lovecraft counseled his correspondent to "read what Harlow Shapley, A. S. Eddington, J. H. Jeans, or any contemporary astrophysicist has to say," and from a God-killer's standpoint the choice of these authorities in particular was ironically inapt. Arthur Eddington, a practicing member of the Society of Friends, had already delivered his Gifford Lectures for 1927 at the University of Edinburgh, on *The Nature of the Physical World,* and had come out foursquare for mystical religion. In 1932 Sir James Jeans argued that, contrary to all materialist expectations, "the stream of knowledge is heading toward a nonmechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine." And Harlow Shapley eventually joined with a group of church laymen, clergy from various denominations, and scientists from several disciplines to meet periodically on Star Island for summer retreats; out of their discussions would grow an Institute of Religion in an Age of Science, dedicated to the proposition "that science, in a wide sense, could enrich the holdings of religion, and that religion could perhaps ennoble the concepts of science." This was a striking departure from the view, widely held in the nineteenth century, that the only proper relationship between science and theology was one of warfare.

Admittedly, the terms of the debate had subtly changed. "Religion" for some of these men was a very broad concept indeed. Albert Einstein, whose unique blend of saintly simplicity with

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mathematical profundity so haunted the twentieth-century popular imagination, ringingly declared in 1940 that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind"; science could only be created by men "thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding," an aspiration that "springs from the sphere of religion." Yet Einstein seems also to have read the Almighty's death notices: "In their struggle for the ethical good," he asserted, "teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God." Did this mean that God was dead, exactly? "A conviction, akin to religious feeling, of the rationality or intelligibility of the world lies behind all scientific work of a high order," Einstein declared on another occasion. "This firm belief, a belief bound up with deep feeling, in a superior mind that reveals itself in the world of experience, represents my conception of God."

Some scientists, of course, rejected both the acknowledged theism of a Jeans or an Eddington and the more cryptic confession of an Einstein. "Like bed bugs in the cracks of walls and furniture, miracles lurk in the lacunae of science," wrote J. B. S. Haldane in 1934. "The scientist plasters up these cracks in our knowledge; the more militant rationalist swats the bugs in the open." But enough religious affirmation went on in scientific circles during the early thirties to prompt a letter to the *New York Times* deploring the "tendency of modern scientists to drift into the morasses of mysticism." Perhaps the tide of Professor Handy's "religious depression" was already turning; Robert A. Millikan, holder of a Nobel Prize in physics, claimed in 1932 that the younger scientists of his own acquaintance were joining the churches, and then as now the future presumably belonged to the young. Were the thirties, that decade of immense political energies and vast social hopes, *more* congenial to the religious mind than the twenties had been? It is a view that few of our recent interpreters of the thirties would accept, but perhaps the possibility should be entertained and explored.

As the statistical and societal decline of the churches bottomed out and their fortunes began to rally (at least in America), and as the public image of organized religion became more favorable,

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"modernist" religious apologists, understandably, listened to the Millikans and Eddingtons, ignored the Haldanes and Bertrand Russells, and interpreted Einstein to suit themselves. Moreover, there are always some discussants of this question who seek to evade its rigor by dividing up the territories respectively allotted to science and to religion, and then insisting that so long as each sticks to its home turf there can be no conflict between them. Responsible fundamentalists raised the proper objection; for example, J. Gresham Machen (1925): "It is a poor religion that can abandon to science the whole realm of objective truth, in order to reserve for itself merely a realm of ideals." Some thoughtful modernists concurred.

In 1935 Willard Sperry, the distinguished dean of the Harvard Divinity School, rejected this temptation to take evasive action, in which one concedes to science the entire world of "facts" in order to reserve to religion the entire world of "values," on the ground that his own Victorian and Gilded Age intellectual forefathers—he mentioned Henry Drummond and John Fiske—had made no such concession: "The Christian religion has never succeeded, or even survived for any length of time, when it has devoted its energies solely to the struggle to preserve itself in some pristine and uncontaminated purity." It must face up to, and at some points absorb, the best secular thinking of its time. Although this has anticipatory echoes of the "secular city" debate among Protestants during the 1960s, clearly Sperry did not expect such an encounter to lead inexorably to the death of God.

As new intellectual movements claim our attention we sometimes overlook the extent of their overlap with older ones. In 1963—just as the most recent "death-of-God" debate was about to get under way—Charles K. Robinson, at that time assistant professor of religion at Duke University, published in the *Journal of Religion* an article entitled "Biblical Theism and Modern Science." From the abandonment of mechanistic physics, from field theory (both in biology and in physics), from post-Freudian developments in psychotherapy, and (perhaps more dubiously) from parapsychology, Robinson concluded that the universe was not, as nineteenth-century materialistic determinism had assumed,

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"a very long-playing record whose grooves are all rigidly cut in advance"; rather, "the universe which God has in fact created is a world characterized by flexibility and variability in its orderly patterns of interrelation and interaction." This situation would admit the logical possibility even of miracle: "It is important to indicate vis-à-vis modern science that the concept of God's special agency in and through physical and biological levels of reality need not involve any 'violation' of the orderly integrity of wave-particles or vital organisms." (It was a point that had been made, with greater logical precision, by the Puritan Urian Oakes in 1677.) What, then, had become of the "leprosy of the miraculous" from which science in the nineteenth century had been expected to help men cleanse themselves?

It is of course arguable that theological writers like Charles Robinson and Dean Sperry were voices in the wilderness. From time to time a distinguished churchman has declared that twentieth-century concepts like relativity and quantum physics *ought* to become part of the intellectual furniture for any modern man, but this is often coupled with a lament that so far—and for Protestants especially!—Sir Charles Snow has yet to be proven wrong. The German Protestant theologian Karl Heim has explained this attitude largely in terms of the intellectually ubiquitous nineteenth century. "The history of Protestantism took an unhappy turn when, soon after the time of Schleiermacher [d. 1834], Protestant theology severed its connexion with philosophy in order to become an independent field," Heim wrote in 1949. "Since then it has shown more and more reluctance to undertake the difficult task of opposing the world picture of disbelief with a world picture of belief." For Protestantism, such reluctance could prove fatal:

> Amid the totally transformed environment of the modern academic disciplines, . . . if the confession of faith of the Reformers is stated at all nowadays it makes the same impression as would a last-remaining venerable fragment of wall, all that is left standing of a medieval cathedral . . . , appearing as a foreign body amidst the newly erected blocks of offices and flats of a modern city. During the last war a deep impression was made when, after an air raid on Mayence [Mainz], all

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that remained standing of a church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was a fragment of a doorway on which were inscribed the words: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" But this ruin from the past could not be left standing like that permanently. Either it could be built up again into a complete church of a design which fitted in with it, or it would have to be pulled down and cleared away.

No doubt the articulation of a world picture of belief that would relate intelligibly to the secular city and universe has become extraordinarily difficult for the nonscientist, in an age when scientists themselves dispute whether they need to posit any kind of ultimate reality (theistic or naturalistic) in order to do their work. Moreover, the consumer of ideas, like the consumer of automobiles, is cursed with the problem of instant obsolescence. "Three centuries have passed since the beginning of the scientific revolution," wrote Samuel Miller in 1957, "and in that time the issues have changed kaleidoscopically from decade to decade. Probably nothing contrived to postpone a stable rapprochement [between science and religion] more than the shifting nature of the scientific advance."

The real intellectual beneficiary from this situation might be the existentialist, whether atheist or Christian, who rejected *all* self-consistent systems, and found competing theistic and antitheistic monisms equally spurious; Einstein's "conviction . . . of the rationality or intelligibility of the world" would not go down well with the kind of "postmodern" man for whom the universe, rationally or morally considered, is absurd. The very fact that some pattern of coherence or purpose has been discerned in the universe by prestigious members of the scientific establishment could be taken as an argument *against* the existence of a living God, by those of the newest generation of radicals who condemned science and technology as inherently sterile and inhumane.

Did the "God is dead" movement of the sixties have an organic connection with the long positivist erosions of the last three centuries—a connection unknown to some of its adherents, who have only recently discovered that they live in a "secular city"? Possibly for the reasons suggested by Oppenheimer, the radical theologians of the decade just past have tended to draw their argu-

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ment more from philosophy, linguistics and literature than directly from the natural sciences. God's death was not to be inferred from Darwinian evolution or from the second law of thermodynamics—or, to update the argument, from molecular biology or from Fred Hoyle's theory of the continuous creation of matter. Rather, the death of God was most convincingly experienced as an honest and inescapable subjective insight. But since subjective states can change as rapidly and unexpectedly as scientific hypotheses, it is difficult to see how the claim that God is dead could have been made, as it often was in the sixties, with such dogmatic historical finality. Some of the claimants, with little sense of history, seem not to have known that they felt as the Psalmist, as the Preacher, as Thomas à Kempis, John Bunyan and a host of others had felt before them—only to decide, when the chips were down, that they must trust in a living God.

In an article for *motive,* the lamented magazine of the Methodist Student Movement, Fred M. Hudson in 1966 formulated four possible meanings of the "death of God." First, God may be *psychologically* dead: "Man has lost his inner awareness of God." But if that is so, then the vivid panorama of felt realities that William James captured in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* no longer speaks to anyone's condition, and we must ignore the testimony of present-day evangelicals or mystics to the contrary. Second, God may be *sociologically* dead: "The political, economic, and educational institutions which used to convey and confirm the presence of God no longer do so." But if that is so, then neither the formal richness of the nationally televised Roman Catholic obsequies for John Kennedy nor the simple impressiveness of the great public Baptist memorial for Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed beyond themselves toward any shared collective reality. Third, God may be *ontologically* dead, in that today "we have no words or symbols which *mean* God"—notwithstanding those irrepressible American astronauts who decided to read from the first chapter of Genesis while orbiting the moon one Christmas Eve. To state such propositions in so categorical a fashion is at once dialectically to raise doubts about them.

There is also, however, the fourth proposition, namely that

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God is *theologically* dead, so that Christian (and perhaps also Jewish) theology has become only a somewhat novel mode of atheist humanism. It is this fourth definition of the death of God that seems to have aroused most of the clamor. No longer was it "they"—the freewheeling infidels like Bob Ingersoll and Tom Paine, or the scientific materialists like Ernst Haeckel, or the Marxists, or the Freudians, or the Psalmist's "fool," who said in their hearts (and on video) "There is no God." It was "we," members of "the blessed company of all faithful people," who had worked out the logic of the faith itself into atheism. Unitarians had faced up to this question long before, but they were and are numerically a small fraction of American churchmen; the radical religion of the sixties seemed not only to proclaim the death of God but to call for the spiritual suicide of the entire evangelical Protestant mainstream.

Yet that Protestant stream in America has known many twists and turnings. The example of the rigorous-minded nineteenth century, which decreed the death of God but was unable to make it stick, and of the Roaring Twenties, which predicted a "twilight of Christianity" that turned into a religious revival instead, should warn us that it would be a rash historian indeed who could confidently extrapolate the downturn of the past decade into a long-term trend. From the radical critical perspective of the mid-1960s, the "Jesus people" who are our own contemporaries—equally as radical, after their fashion—could hardly have been foreseen.

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1957

DANIEL HOFFMAN

Nous battons pour rien.
—Germaine Tillion

Leaves fall,
cold clouds smear the sky
on a drizzled night
singing
ricochets across the garden gate
singing
scuffle and laughter
jangle at the bellpull
crowdburst in the kitchen
by the warm stove laughing
bravado's gang and uproar
Michèle,
Jean,
Jean-Pierre—
the new conscripts' last amicable toot
in Saint-Appollinaire.
We stuff their can with franc notes
for one good long, long night of it,
long to remember
au Café Hutot
with the red carafes, Marie, Annette,
to remember far,
far over the sea
en Algérie.

An Algerian came through Saint-Appollinaire today,
Staggering under his bundle of sleazy rugs.
Little guy with weasel teeth and skin
Like a sunbaked shoe, he looked as though for wine

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And meat he'd sucked mulemilk and gnawed shinrind.
Here was Penury's mask. Here Malnutrition
Owned all the bones, and Manumission never
Balmed the hands that Toil made hard as claws.
Could buying his rugs give this Algerian pause
From the oppressions of all of his oppressors?
Whose allegories are the wares he brings
To Burgundy? He has no intercessors.
All pity is futile to assuage the wrongs
That made him stunted, weasel-toothed and dour.
He trudged from gate to gate. From half-closed shutters
The women peered at him, conferred in mutters;
One made a tight-lipped dicker at the door
As though in civil speech she might court danger
From this citizen foe or merely stranger.
Nor did he speak a word out of the mystery
That as he trudged shrouded his misery.

Snow falls,
grubby along tramlines
The grimed light of winter
dribbles between walled gardens,
drops in drear courts.
Girders, in the glum air,
frame hollow squares.
The sky leaks
through towering sieves.
No bricks
rise between the girders,
no walls rise.
The new Cité's a ruin
unroofed, untenanted.
The riveters are in Constantine
careful in the scrub grass
bricklayers mind the machinegun
poised at the village well.

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Their untopped wall in Dijon stands
backdrop for a legend scrawled
last night by unknown hands:
PAX EN ALGÉRIE

We sit in the springtime garden. A high Mystère
Uncombs its surfy trails across the sky.
Bees are busy. The hivebox, white and square,
Drones and rumbles. Honey and perfume reign.
It's hard to think of the sniper's whiplash whine,
The lurch and fall between the parked machines,
The orange surge, the pall defacing blue
Tracing new epitaphs upon the sky.
The old chateau—our village school—stands high
And green with ivy, an image doubly still,
Stony towers in air, a water-wall
Mirrored in the moat our children cross.
Coffee in the morning sun: the busy chug
Of Monsieur le Facteur's punctual 2-cv
With the world's woes in the papers one day late.
Our concierge runs down the barred iron stairs
Hands on the rail, as eagerly as she dares
To sift what's stuffed in the box in the garden gate
For the envelope her youngest son Michèle
May, or may not, have scrawled—he'd not forget—
From Algiers on a sunbaked parapet.

Rains fall,
and between the tables, trees
hold back, then shower
droplets down. Near home
at dusk, their wheels
stacked in the roadside stall,
they read of the raid in the papers—
a name they know in the papers;
at their table an empty chair.

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Summer rainfalls bring
lowings and baas from the barnyards;
in the gutters the children
paddle in puddles,
singing their rain-songs
in the green world
where grain rises
in golden walls
and golden pearls
on the vines bulge
and the showering rain
teems from the branches
as tears fall.

Let them tend the olive groves and vineyards.
Let those whom the muzzein's wailings call together
And they who gather at the matins' toll
Assuage the famished moan, the orphaned cry,
The snap and whine of the whiplash sniper's bullet,
Tinkle and roar in the bombed café, the dry
Rasp as truncheon hits the prisoner's gut—
Pity is futile. None can intercede.
They die for nothing. The flesh of France is shrinking.
In the bitter heat of the citron African sun
Each death lives on, an insatiate cancer cell
Spreading revenge's virus through the whole
Body which for her balm and cure has need
To cauterize and lance the poisonings that seep
From festered heart to numb compassionate head.
We grieve for the grief of friends, grieve for the dead
We scarcely knew.
At the bier, peace falls,
After viaticum.

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The New Plenitude

JUDSON JEROME

OUR DUAL REVOLUTION FOLLOWS THE PATTERN of what David Riesman (speaking of innovation in colleges) has called the S curve of a snake. Movement forward is a matter of tacking right and left in sinuous dialectic, with apparent parallels between elements of society at quite different stages of development (the similarities between what Charles Reich calls Consciousness I and Consciousness III) and apparent contradictions between what seem logical allies (the activist-hippie split in the new culture). Segments may quarrel among themselves about which direction the snake is moving and therefore who is in fact ahead. Choice and historical inevitability often seem at odds; it is unclear which provides the motive force. In the turmoil of cultural change, such confusions and conflicts are usually impossible to resolve. But from time to time come moments of clarity when something like national purpose is felt and willingly responded to. Then the snake slithers forward with coordinated effort, free from paralyzing inner tensions. I have some hope that we are entering such an era of agile progression.

In economic terms the dual revolution pertains to maximization and minimization of production of material goods, and more particularly to entry into and rejection of an ever-expanding and ever-more-prosperous middle class. The dream of abundance evoked by the industrial era finds itself in conflict with a dream of plenitude, as defined by Lewis Mumford in *The Pentagon of Power:* "The tendency of the present power system," he says,

✪ This article is excerpted from a study of communal living by JUDSON JEROME. The Twentieth Century Fund aided in financing research for this study. Other books Mr. Jerome has written include *Culture Out of Anarchy: The Reconstruction of American Higher Learning* and *Plays for an Imaginary Theater.* It is by coincidence that both Judson Jerome and René Dubos in THE DESPAIRING OPTIMIST chose to treat the work of Lewis Mumford.

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"goes directly contrary to the ideal of plenitude," which would emphasize decentralization, autonomy, and the restoration of more and more human functions to conscious control. Primitive societies have often achieved a degree of such plenitude—relative leisure, variety, self-determination, integration and wholeness of personality—but only at the expense of "fossilization" and supine dependence upon natural windfall. Typically, the paradises of primitive culture are in tropical zones. "Plenitude on such a solitary, meager, unadventurous basis too easily sinks into torpid penury and stupefaction." Mumford notes that even Thoreau found his tenure at Walden Pond, after all, only a vacation from a life of fuller engagement:

> It is not to go back toward such a primitive plenitude, but forward to a more generous regimen, far more generous than the most affluent society now affords, that the coming generations must lay their plans.

Two essential components of the new plenitude are a breakdown of specialization (the "division of labor" that Emile Durkheim thought necessary to civilization) and the correction of the economic model of unlimited growth by providing for "contraction as well as expansion, for restrictive discipline as well as liberation, for inhibition as well as expression, for continuity as well as change." From the point of view of the old culture, the new culture's emphasis upon diversity of activity seems to be dilettantism; its de-emphasis upon productivity seems regressive. But, as described by Mumford, these are exactly the characteristics that may create the kind of economic objective toward which all contending factions of the body politic would be willing to strive.

> Under a regime of plenitude abundance is permissive, not compulsive: it allows for extravagant expenditures to satisfy man's higher needs for knowledge, beauty, or love . . . while it may exact the severest economy for less worthy purposes. . . .
>
> This benign transformation can happen only on one condition, and that a hard one: namely that the life-negating ideals and methods of the power system be renounced, and that a conscious effort be made,

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at every level and in every kind of community, to live not for the sake of exalting power but for reclaiming this planet for life through mutual aid, loving association and biotechnic cultivation. . . .

There is . . . little prospect of overcoming the defects of the power system by any attack that employs mass organizations and mass efforts at persuasion; for these mass methods support the very system they attack. The changes that have so far been effective, and that give promise of further success, are those that have been initiated by animated individual minds, small groups, and local communities nibbling at the edges of the power structure by breaking routines and defying regulations. Such an attack seeks, not to capture the citadel of power, but to withdraw from it and quietly paralyze it. Once such initiatives become widespread, as they at last show signs of becoming, it will restore power and confident authority to its proper source: the human personality and the small face-to-face community. . . .

For its effective salvation mankind will need to undergo something like a spontaneous religious conversion: one that will replace the mechanical world picture with an organic world picture, and give to the human personality, as the highest known manifestation of life, the precedence it now gives to its machines and computers. . . . Such changes have repeatedly occurred all through history; and under catastrophic pressure they may occur again. Of only one thing we may be confident. If mankind is to escape its programmed self-extinction the God who saves us will not descend from the machine: he will rise up again in the human soul.

Above all, if our society is to cure itself of psychological impasse, to make its internal strains and tensions creative, there has to be a development toward seeing differences as complementary rather than mutually threatening, and, more specifically, toward seeing the new culture not as a refutation of the old, but as an organic outgrowth from it. Although Mumford and others who have come to see cultural change as both inevitable and desirable sometimes speak in apocalyptic tones of what will happen if it does not soon occur, most such prophets, if they have truly incorporated an organic world picture in their vision, recognize the credit due for the processes that have brought us to a new point of reversal. "Precisely because of the productive technical advances made during the last two centuries," Mumford says, "the lifetime division of labor has become irrelevant." Sim-

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ilarly, as the new culture matures, it is able to move past rebellion toward the revolution that saves, rather than destroys, the culture that produced it.

It has been chiefly since 1968—with its assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the Democratic Convention, the invasion of Czechoslovakia—that the new culture turned the corner from withdrawal and rebellion and aching disillusion to the work of creating more deeply rooted enclaves and a network of communication and cooperation sufficient to sustain its life. The mood has been one of peacefully ignoring the system in order to work on concrete building of alternatives—decentralized, relatively closer to the land, nonauthoritarian, non-profit-oriented, based on "soft" technology (called by Mumford "biotechnics," that is, ways of living that are ecologically sound and that emphasize the self-sufficiency of relatively small communities).

For example, a Michigan urban commune which has persisted since 1964 with a remarkably consistent membership of nineteen adults and three children recognized a transformation in its focus in 1970:

All these things . . . pushed our whole approach farther and farther to the left, toward the general hysteria and frenzy which was driving the former civil rights/peace movement into the streets with rocks and bottles instead of protest signs after the Chicago stomp scene. The problem with this approach which soon overshadowed the constructive work we had been doing, was that it was mounted out of simple frustration and rage without much thought for its consequences. We had been pushed to the point where we just *reacted* against the forces that were messing us over. . . . We started threatening the government with all kinds of ridiculous militant rhetoric which we could not possibly back up, and the government of course took us at our word . . . and moved in ways that would insure our elimination. . . . The total *senselessness* of what had happened was what hit us the hardest—it began to dawn on all of us that we had just been stumbling along doing whatever popped into our heads without regard for either the personal or political consequences of our actions, and that something had to be done about it *immediately* if we wanted to have any future effectiveness, let alone survive. . . . We really learned that we

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could solve our problems by discussing them openly. . . . It blew our minds!

They came to understand, "We were not revolutionaries; we were only rebels." By 1972 they had brought together a tribal council in their city, a "shadow government" composed of local groups concerned with food, health, community activities, education, transportation, housing and defense. With the help of a grant from H.E.W. and rental by the city of two huge buildings, they set up a permanent headquarters for a whole range of health and educational services—drug help, food cooperative, people's defense, finance, artists' workshops, music, a ballroom, and community gardening. They had suffered through the changes from a sometimes sullen, sometimes manic militancy to a joyful, regenerative, open spirit.*

Before 1968 there were many stories in the papers of harassment of communes, but these have largely disappeared.† Good relations with neighbors are a high priority for communards who are more dedicated than desperate in their efforts to change society. "They think we're crazy, but they love us," is a typical comment from a rural commune in New England. Neighbors learn to respect the capacity of rural communards for hard work,

* For example, the group had been active in efforts to legalize marijuana, when, according to a woman member, "A group of state legislators came around to find out what pot looked like. We poured out a pile of it on the table, showed them pipes, how to roll joints, how to hold roaches. Then we insisted they should try a little so they'd know what they were dealing with. We turned all of them on, except one black dude who went in the other room. He said he knew very well what it was like to smoke it—but he didn't want to get caught."

† At least from the papers, but legal harassment of communes continues. After several years of severe financial and emotional strain in legal battles with public authorities, a well-known open land commune in California finally had its access road virtually closed in 1972. "When it finally happened, we welcomed it as a good change," they reported, as visitors were forced to hike in through a canyon, and the result was much more community serenity and stability. Nonetheless, the case represents a constitutional setback for the new culture. Cases involving communes often illustrate unequal enforcement of laws, but it is extremely difficult to establish that persons in the new culture are being discriminated against as a group (as can more easily be established pertaining to members of a religious sect or ethnic minority). For a discussion of several classic cases and the constitutional questions involved, see Jonathan Shor, *"All* in the 'Family': Legal Problems of Communes," *Harvard Civil Rights/ Civil Liberties Law Review* (March, 1972). There are occasional victories. Two members of a Cambridge, Massachusetts, commune successfully defended themselves against the charge of "open and gross lewdness and lascivious behavior," and the amusing and enlightening transcript of their trial is printed in *Lewd: The Inquisition of Seth and Carolyn* (Beacon, 1972).

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their interest in traditional wisdom and skills, and their willingness to help others. On the other hand, the neighbors have learned to tolerate (and in some cases to enjoy) a certain amount of nude farming, pot smoking, and blurring of sex roles as women show up to help on the hay wagon, leaving men to tend the babies.

As each new commune forms, it usually sends out tentacles of association with other freaks in the area, or around the country. Many new communes (if they have access to ditto or mimeograph machines) start newsletters resembling the Christmas letters that straight families sometimes circulate among their friends and acquaintances. Most of these are abortive: the buoyant expectations of the first issue soon grind on the rocks of personal dissension, membership turnover, daily work demands and other hard conditions of communal survival. Within a few months I heard of half a dozen groups that hoped to establish commune clearing-houses for people seeking to join communes, communes seeking members, goods to exchange, and other news relative to the movement. These, too, generally disappear, although a few persist in urban areas. One organization in Boston reported twice weekly meetings (attendance ranging from sixty to eighty per meeting) for people interested in meeting others in communes or hoping to start new ones. They started a referral service handling some forty people per week, involving over 135 communes in a four-month period. They offer life-style counseling, facilitation for problem-solving in communes, legal assistance, a food cooperative involving some 50 communes, an urban/rural network, "consciousness raising data collection," and assistance in finding and acquiring real estate.

In the San Francisco Bay area a private commune newsletter circulates among over three hundred communes. Each issue is hand-lettered, hand-bound, tied with thread, and illustrated. Each copy is a work of art, hand-delivered to communes on its circulation list (which is carefully limited—especially to exclude mass media and researchers). It contains want ads, tidbits of personal news, and survival lore (for example, a recipe for kitten soup, prefaced by the statement that cats rip off affection that should go to human beings). An organization of Vermont communes pro-

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vides not only a newsletter, but also a whole range of cooperative services from food buying to child care. One year children from the communes in this group formed their own children's collective, a kind of free school (with some adult participation), in which children substantially ran their own lives on their own farm.

Like educational conferences in the straight world, there are numerous, periodic conferences held around the country on communal living, alternative life styles, consciousness raising, free clinics, organic gardening, inexpensive building, folk music and other topics of interest to the new culture. I attended one such (on education) in which some eighty people packed together in a five-room farmhouse for a winter weekend in upper New York State. In better weather, the communards and the curious are likely to gather on a farm, like Okies along Highway 66, in battered VW vans and Econolines adapted for camping. Many of these conferences are sponsored by universities; one was sponsored by the National Institutes of Mental Health; but most are called by individual communes as a public service.

Beneath the clutter of newsletters, food conspiracies, free clinics, free stores, free schools, free churches, legal aid groups (for example, the Counterculture Law Project in Chicago, and law communes and collectives in most major cities), conferences, journals and other appurtenances of a growing web of political-economic services and communications, the basic medium by which the new culture grows and develops is personal contact. There is a huge network of trust spread across the nation among friends and friends of friends. If I know a hundred people you don't know—people to whom I would, for instance, gladly extend the hospitality of a meal and floor space for the night, people to whom I would lend my car—and if you know a hundred people in that category whom I don't know, and if we trust each other's judgment enough to extend trust to each other's friends, our orbit includes some two hundred people. If we feel the same way about our friends as we do about each other, the progression is exponential: ten thousand are included in this

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relationship. As for chain letters and other such devices, there are natural limits restricting the unlimited spread of the web, but there are surely some hundreds of thousands of freaks by now who might, if they compared notes, find that they were at least the friend of a friend of a friend, and such relationships have a meaning and function in the new culture that they have not had in the old. The web of trust developed primarily as a result of the extralegal planning and collaboration in the civil rights movement and then in the drug culture, when secure credentials on the basis of personal testimony became critical, and written credentials, positions and formal affiliations were suspect. "He's cool" was an assurance that could pass from person to person at least three or four removes from the original basis of interpersonal trust.

At one point an unscrupulous entrepreneur put some LSD of poor quality (laced with strychnine) on the streets. Immediately those who call themselves "the people" responded to the threat. Those dealing in "good" stuff gave it away. If someone tried to sell acid, the prospective customer could be fairly certain it was bad. Bad stuff was cleared off the market in a matter of weeks. That phenomenon could occur only under conditions in which personal trust had a functional meaning in a coherent culture.

Given the distinctive garb and hairstyles of the new culture, even indirect personal knowledge is usually unnecessary. When we bought a farm to start our own commune, I opened a personal checking account in the local bank with a $1,000 check. But I needed cash that day, and the bank refused to cash a check until my deposit was cleared. I offered to pay for a call to the bank on which the check was drawn, but that was insufficient guarantee. I gave them the names of local merchants with whom I had opened accounts, but these were too recent for the comfort of the bank officials. From there I went to the supermarket and happened to strike up a conversation in the aisle with an identifiable freak—a longhair mechanic who had operated a garage in the town for over a year. When I mentioned my difficulties with the bank, he immediately offered to countersign the check, al-

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though I had met him only five minutes before. He went along to the bank with another longhair, a member of our commune. By chance they got the same teller I had dealt with, and she, remembering my name, was now faced by two freaks, with my check for $100. "Do you know these people?" she asked the mechanic, who had an account at the bank. "I just met them," he said, but she had no choice but to cash the check his account covered.*

I do not mean to imply that such trust is always warranted. Any longhair has stories of being ripped off by longhairs, even those they regard as close friends. Sometimes such experiences embitter the victims. In "resigning" from the movement, Abbie Hoffman wrote:

> The movement to me now is a little group of vultures from Ithaca that broke into WPAX (we were making tapes for Radio Hanoi) and stole all the equipment they needed because "Hoffman's rich anyway". . . . I know one thing. I don't use the phrase "brothers and sisters" much anymore, except among real close friends and you'll never hear me use the word "movement" except in a sarcastic sense.

But the web of trust is sustaining enough for most purposes. Most new culture people haven't enough possessions to be much concerned about rip-offs. Even if the mechanic's $100 in the bank had been his last, it mattered less to him than $100 meant to the banker; he wanted to keep his income down to avoid paying taxes and was ridding himself of possessions to which he felt he had an unhealthy attachment.

Without that element of relinquishment of material goods, the new culture might be a kind of Mafia, in which bonds of the "family" are inviolable, based on personal contact and affection; communication is instantaneous, the messages classically brief

* In spite of this apparent conflict, the ethics of the new culture are very much like those of rural America. That same bank makes loans and does business primarily on the basis of informal personal knowledge and trust. After a few months in the area, any member of our commune could make deposits or transfers of money from one account to another, including personal accounts, at the same bank, without signatures of the parties involved. This could even be done by phone: we can call up and ask for $100 to be transferred from Joseph's account to the farm's account, for example, and the transaction will take place without so much as a deposit or withdrawal slip being signed.

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and pungent, and outside the family is a vast, valueless jungle in which anything goes. Ma Bell, for instance, is fair game to many in the new culture. An article in the *Quicksilver Times* signed by "The People's Operators" gave inside information on credit cards, advising readers to switch to phony special billing numbers, which (as of March, 1972) had not been programmed into the computers that check credit cards. "Give the largest pig monopoly in the world another big headache," the people's operators advised, at a time when I.T.T. was being exposed for bribery involving antitrust action and an attempt to interfere in South American politics. Thus it seemed not only convenient, but also a matter of principle, to cheat the corporation. Electronics experts of the underground have produced little blue boxes (multifrequency tone signals) that penetrate the codes of long-distance systems. Standing in a phone booth, they can beep out the signals that reach even the most guarded numbers around the globe, and sometimes send calls to London, Paris, Athens, Tokyo and home, to answer themselves in a neighboring booth, just for kicks. If they had the Mafia's interest in money and power, they could quickly become formidable and dangerous.

But communards generally have little interest in playing games with corporations. More common are the attitudes expressed by a member of a farm commune in Pennsylvania:

> I just don't trust a rip-off mentality. It's like what mothers used to say about the cookie jar. Once a guy starts ripping off the phone company, or welfare, or a foundation, or a supermarket, he kind of gets the habit, and he'll be ripping you off next thing you know.

Although this man technically qualified for welfare, he did not apply for it. "I don't really need it," he said. He took pride in living on almost no money at all and believed that if he had more cash he would "live soft" and be less able to cope. "I want welfare to be there when I really need it," he said. He did use food stamps, however, a price support program that he thought served the interests of farmers (although in fact it serves primarily the agribusiness that destroys small farmers) as well as providing needed food he could not raise himself.

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Traveling and visiting are much more important means of communication in the new culture than are telephones or publications. Some make a career of visiting—for example, a young man who figures horoscopes in exchange for hospitality. His dharma, he says, is to go from commune to commune bearing the news. Another man, a fifty-year-old expert on organic gardening, massage and yoga, was present in the early days of such well-known communes as the Lama Foundation, Morningstar, Olompali and the Hog Farm. Wherever he goes he is welcomed and loved; he helps out in the garden and sometimes acts (like an encounter group leader) as an outside consultant on interpersonal problems. A woman who traveled the country gathering recipes for a commune cookbook said:

> While I was staying at Breadloaf [commune names are fictional] in New Mexico, the Pride Family arrived in a gaily painted delivery van, with their tepee poles on top. Remnant of a commune in California that had broken up when the owner of the house they occupied raised the rent, the five had crossed and recrossed the country in the last few months. First they had gone up to Atlantis in Oregon and planted the garden that I had later admired. Then they headed across the midwest, stopping over at the Foundlings in Iowa and the farm in Wawa, Minnesota. By the time I got back to Vermont, I was no longer capable of much surprise at learning that Sue, who was visiting my friends there, had lived with the Pride Family in California for seven months. I was glad to be able to tell her that although they had planned to winter in Arizona, Breadloaf's subtle magic had appealed to them and they had pitched their tepee out behind the pueblo.

Information is power. A hitchhiker trudges down the drive to crash for the night, and likely as not he is bearing news of scattered friends. Dropping in on a commune in Vermont, my wife and I left bearing an invitation to a Thanksgiving feast for a commune in New Hampshire. Beyond personal news, visitors also carry skills and data, from wiring and composting to advice on income taxes. Since visitors are frequent and unannounced, communards are not likely to take time off to entertain them. Rather, the visitor fits in to whatever is going on—from weeding

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squash to joining in an encounter meeting. The members of one commune had succeeded in disassembling a tractor and locating a broken bearing, but didn't know what to do next, when a visitor happened along who knew how to get a replacement part and reassemble the machine. A woman there was going through mail on the dinner table. "We never send for anything," she said. "If it is important, it will come to us." The next thing I heard from her was "Far out!" A book had arrived, addressed to someone who had left, written by one of this woman's friends. She drifted off toward the outhouse thumbing through it, and I heard her murmuring, "Far *out!*" through the open kitchen window.

Although few communes have television or even radio, or subscribe to other than local newspapers (for ads about jobs and auctions), they seem mysteriously to keep abreast of current events, largely as carried in the heads of visitors. Organic food stores, record and book shops, and other new culture businesses are, like seventeenth-century coffeehouses in London, or the salons and cafés of Paris that generated the French Revolution, media of information exchange.

Growth and strength begin inward, with the individual, and radiate outward to the group, the local community, the far-flung tribe of the new culture, and last of all to the larger political and economic system. Diet and health are major topics of communication, closely followed by mental health, interpersonal relations and questions of leadership, organization, property ownership and sharing. Next come economic and practical concerns such as work schedules, tools, supplies, marketing, buying and bartering, mechanics, cooking and baking, farming and forestry, local politics. Here, communication begins to fan out to neighbors and the surrounding community. As communes and communards grow more mature, they have more energy to spend on larger social concerns.

For example, thirty-year-old Koinonia, in Georgia, now conducts an impressive range of national charitable enterprises involving hundreds of thousands of dollars. Four-year-old Twin Oaks, in Virginia, spent most of its first years preoccupied with

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internal matters; its members are noticing now that they have energy to spare for setting up wider communications, attending to political developments in their region, and fostering the kinds of economic growth and cooperation that they approve of. Urban groups are more likely to have an outreach of social concern from the beginning; indeed many are formed explicitly for social action. Reporting on communes in the Berkeley area for the *New York Times Magazine,* Steven V. Roberts says:

A whole range of new institutions has sprung up: medical clinics, schools, law firms, churches, businesses, and, most importantly, living groups. Taken together these institutions are beginning to amount to a distinct alternative society. . . . something is happening here. It's very tentative, and very fluid, but quite real.

These new developments are quite in contrast to the years of protest that ushered out the sixties. There is a new patience and historical sense, perhaps derived in part from Mao and Oriental philosophy, Roberts notes.

. . . communal living helps overcome the contradiction between their life and their work. Life and work are integrated into a "whole," another key word in the movement. . . . "There's a lot of knowledge here and people share things. There's also a lot of support for what you're doing, and that's very important". . . . "Here there is always dinner at 6:30, and usually there are 10 or 12 people around. It's good companionship." A girl in another commune explained how they had started: "We got arrested together and no one wanted to go home alone anymore". . . . "More and more people in the movement are saying, 'Which collective—not which individual—will take care of thus and so.' I really like that. I like that form of identity. It's a place to belong." Home, family, belonging—the words tell a lot about the yearnings of the young. Collective living is also an economic necessity. Since many people in the alternative society have given up the idea of a "career" in the traditional sense, and do not want to work full time, the struggle for solvency is constant. . . . Many communes cannot afford even meat loaf. But there is a pervasive feeling in the movement that people do not want material rewards, except perhaps a good stereo and the chance to travel. "Things seem to come along and we're able to make enough," said Barbara. "I

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guess one of the distinguishing facts of our generation is that we never really think about money."

City communes are living bases for people engaged in quite diverse activities—both for subsistence and political action—during the day and through frequent evening meetings. Although there is general agreement on political direction, the hassles about fine points of ideology or life style are apt to be even more disruptive than would be arguments among people with more extreme differences in point of view. But for all their tensions, urban communes are hotbeds of information and collaboration. Like rural communes, they are likely to send their energy out in widening rings, first attending to individual growth, better functioning of the group itself, improvement of the neighborhood, local elections and issues, and last of all national or international politics.

"Family" membership is not necessarily limited to those present at any given time in a commune. A communard from Berkeley told me their group had a number of members in, and regular traffic between, related communes in Amherst, Massachusetts, the Taos area, northern Ohio and New Haven. On the road, a member of one was a member of any of the others for as long as he chose to stay. A large religious commune in Oregon considers itself to have over one hundred fifty members, all in a group marriage. Only about fifty at a time are actually living at the Oregon site, but like cousins abroad, the others are still part of the family. A group marriage near Pittsburgh has entirely dispersed except for one man and two women. The man defined them as "a family without the disadvantage of blood relationship." Someday they might live together again, but maybe not. Their separation didn't affect their sense of belonging to one another.

The seething activity that characterizes the new culture in the seventies is a far cry from the indolence the popular mind associates with dropping out, or the leisurely connotations of the new plenitude. Mumford sees "a slowdown, sometimes even a stoppage" in productivity as essential for many reasons, including the need for leisure to foster "more intimate human relations,"

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for example, for physicians to take time to know patients as whole persons. He quotes approvingly Thoreau's observation that

> the really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure.

But "ease and leisure" need not mean luxury and idleness. A cultural winter is a season of passivity and inaction, except for the glacial movements of the corporate tide. Spring brings bewildering, spontaneous busyness (a kind of opposite of business)—chirping and squirming and tangling of tentacles, with sometimes absurd and tender forms of life pulsing toward dominance, spreading in wild, benign redundancy. Nature's plenitude encroaches on the old economy like moss upon a rock.

Sonata

ROSE STYRON

Coming upon Mozart
suddenly, flute
and cello in the dark,
I am confounded
by tears
for one whose music
fills and marks
forever
a room I thought
abandoned

✪ ROSE STYRON'S new book of verse, *Thieves' Afternoon,* will be published this summer.

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The Miss Etta Cones, the Steins, and M'sieu Matisse

A Memoir

EDWARD T. CONE

THE CONE SISTERS OF BALTIMORE WERE MY AUNTS. They, like my father, were members of what an irreverent young cousin calls The Thirteen Original Cones—the American-born children of my German-Jewish grandparents Herman and Helen Cone (in Germany, Kahn). Actually, the Originals considered themselves only twelve since one had died in infancy. That left nine boys and three girls, whose birthdates, from Moses, the first-born, to Frederick, the "baby," spanned twenty-one years, 1857 to 1878. The natural hierarchy thus created was honored by the younger group, who never spoke to or about one of their seniors without prefixing "Brother" or "Sister" to the given name. Thus, to Aunt Etta and my father, Aunt Claribel was always "Sister Claribel," but she could address them simply as Etta and Julius.

Baltimore knew the sisters as Dr. Cone—for Aunt Claribel had attended medical school and for a time had engaged in research—and Miss Cone, or "Miss Etta." (Aunt Carrie, the oldest of the girls, had married early and moved to North Carolina.) Picasso, according to Gertrude Stein, used to call them "the Miss Etta Cones." It surprised me to learn from Virgil Thomson that this became a favorite way of referring to the sisters in Paris; for Aunt Claribel was the dominant personality, always taking the lead both socially and intellectually. But I suppose that in Europe, as at home, Aunt Etta was recognized as the one who was quietly in charge.

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In Baltimore, certainly, there was no question about it. There were four Cone apartments at the Marlborough on Eutaw Place—connecting ones for Aunt Etta and Uncle Fred (who, like the sisters, was unmarried) and two separate ones for Aunt Claribel (one for her art collection and one for herself); but Aunt Etta's was "home." They all ate in her dining room; they all received guests in her living room; they all depended on her domestic staff. Aunt Etta had been her parents' housekeeper and it was natural for her to continue in this role. She did not consider her apartment as hers alone; it was the Cone family home in Baltimore.

It was, of course, a great deal more than that. Together with Aunt Claribel's "collection" apartment just next door, it constituted an extraordinary private museum. Today the Cone Collection is thought of primarily, or even exclusively, in terms of its paintings—partly because of the way it is now exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and partly because of the number and quality of its canvases, especially those by Matisse. But the collection contains much more. It is really a collection of collections, and in the Marlborough one could see them all—if one had weeks to spend. There were pictures, to be sure: oils, water colors, drawings, prints. There were sculptures: marble, bronze, wood. There were rugs and furniture. There were laces, shawls, textiles and fabrics of all kinds. There were antique jewelry and *objets d'art*. And all these were used, they were enjoyed, they were lived with. They filled to overflowing the small rooms at the Marlborough. The pictures covered every available inch of wall space, even in the bathrooms. Statues stood on the floor and on the piano. One walked on oriental rugs, one sat in Italian Renaissance chairs, one wrote at a Hispano-Moresque desk. My aunts wore the shawls, the lace, the jewelry. They covered their tables with valuable embroidery. What they could not use they stuffed into drawers or cupboards or closets, but they knew where everything was. They bought only what they really wanted, and they loved all that they owned.

Of The Thirteen Originals, Aunt Claribel was the real original, from her defiance of propriety by studying medicine to her purchase of Matisse's shocking "Blue Nude." The legends about

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her are all true: she did open her umbrella to ward off the bats in Ely Cathedral; she did stay in Munich throughout World War I because she couldn't get ready in time to leave; she did brew hot coffee for the communist rebels who came to search her apartment; she did travel back and forth across the Atlantic with a trunk that had remained unopened since her trip of the previous year. She bought two or three of everything, and she never threw anything away. (Her nieces and nephews were the gainers, for after her death Aunt Etta had to dispose of her duplicate and triplicate prints and art books. And some of us are still sleeping on her sheets and pillowcases, for she had far more than she ever used.)

When she traveled, she kept numerous notebooks that throw interesting light on her psychology as a collector. One might say that she collected experiences as well as objects. Her life was apparently composed of rich details, all equally important, all equally savored and remembered and recorded. Her diaries were not personal journals but catalogues of these collected details. I have in my possession a series she called "The Day's Work" covering her trip to Europe in 1913. It contains little subjective comment beyond "beautiful sunset" or "nice cabman" or "Etta is nervous"; rather it attempts to outline with bare exactitude what she did (especially what she bought), when and where she did it, how long it took, and whom she was with. The obsession with specific facts and precise figures (hours and prices) may reflect her scientific training; I suspect that it also represents an attempt to impose some sort of order on her activities and to organize her multifarious impressions. Her entry for Monday, October 20, a typical day in Paris, will indicate the extent of her success and the limitations of her method:

A. M.—Rose 8? A. M. bath—*no breakfast*—underground to Madeleine
—metropolitain .15 centimes 2d class ones
.25 centimes 1st class return
lunch—as below. Went to Jeanne Haller selected

to cost 550 fr
- 1 cloth waist
- 1 chiffon cloth waist
- 1 india silk waist and 12 buttons extra

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did not get to Saddler's. 2 P. M. *Lunch at Station*
Duval's 2.15 + 20 = 2.35 fr. Duval near Garre St Lazarre [*sic*]
1.30-2 P. M. Walked to Bank 2.45-5.15 P. M.
Gertrude & Miss Taklos [*sic!*] dinner for 3—Foyot.
dinner with wine 30.55
fee 3.00
33.55 fr.
After leaving Jeanne Haller went up Rue Tronchet behind Madeleine to 37 Rue Tronchet—Madame Gaches-Sarraute 14 Rue de Rome near Gare St Lazarre [map of locale]
Madame le Docteur *Gaches-Sarraute*
14 Rue de Rome à l'Angle de la rue St. Lazare
Copy in Ad. B. [Address-Book]
From Madame Gaches-Sarraute went to Duval's for lunch as above—near Rue de Rome—Gare Lazare—then to Bank where drew £20 = 504.40 fr. as above Copied various places & amounts of drawing on letter [of] credit & gave it up—3 (2.45)-4 P. M. wrote till 4.15 read 4.15-5.25 P. M. American papers.- Took Metropolitan for Rue de Rennes—.25 c. fare 1st class 7.40 P. M. Hotel 6 P. M. rested Gertrude & Miss Taklos 7.10 P. M. showed them my jewelry wh. they admired. Went to Foyot—supper 33.55 fr. then to Gertrude's—(see bill whether correct) talked smoked etc. Leo brought me home 10.45-12.15 P. M. 'night sat and talked on art & *beauty* & *aesthetics* no def. of beauty—like "Frank" in Cent dictionary (may mean one of many things) To bed 2 A. M. or 1.30

(Later entries, by the way, reveal that Mme. le Docteur was a corsetmaker.)

"The Day's Work" contains many lists of memoranda, which constituted another habitual attempt at organization. Indeed, according to the testimony of the diaries, much of Aunt Claribel's time must have been spent in drawing them up and copying them. Here, for example, is her list of chores on arrival in Florence:

Remember—to get out new red pad.
1. Copy—lists of last night in this book of The Day's Work
2. remember engagement for Sunday lunch 1 P. M. with Leo Stein the[n] go to Miss Blood's for P. M.
3. Write Etta.
4. Copy lists
5. Count money Italian

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6. " " of all denominations, and place in special receptacles.
7. *especially* Count French money
8. and put in blk book money from last years.
9. try on 6 pr. gloves

A memorandum pad from the same period, headed "Remember, Summer 1913," consists of nothing but lists. There are pages of "Purchases to make in Paris," under such headings as waists, skirts, corsets, underwear, jewelry, cologne and "Isadora Duncan Drawings." There is a "List of Presents already given and cost," followed by "Presents to give Nov. 1913 on coming home and Xmas." These are methodically arranged under Family, Relatives, Friends, Acquaintances, Employees, Marlborough (a. assistants, b. servants, c. maids), [Johns] Hopkins, Friends' servants, Friends' children. ("Family," as opposed to "Relatives," meant brothers and sisters and their children, while only one person was listed as an "Acquaintance" rather than a "Friend.") Then there are lists of books to take along and to send home, contents of trunks packed and to be packed, letters written and to be written. Most important of all is a "Routine when leaving town," to which special attention is directed by a blue crayon border. It reminds her of every step, from packing—

1. a. *Pack* trunk 2 days before leaving
   b. " bags also 2 days before if possible
   c. " "necessary" things in bags on last day

through arrangements for forwarding mail, buying tickets, sending luggage and changing currency, to the final items of food and money for the journey:

5. *Luncheon*
   Hotel or elsewhere Sandwiches and eggs—salt.
   Fruit—get day before
   Cakes— " " "
6. Count money
7. Arrange purse for handbag or packet
   a. to contain about $5 in foreign money necessary.

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$5 = 20 m.
25 fr.
27 pesetas (or more) } in change for travel

b. purse to contain fees
c. " " " amount of bill.
d. purse for money of next country.

On leaving town, all she had to do was hand out tips from purse b, pay her bill from purse c, and hold on to a and d! But the preparation for that moment must have been so arduous that one can understand why, the following year, she failed to make the last train out of Munich.

As a small boy I came to know both aunts through their frequent visits to Greensboro, North Carolina, where my father, along with several other Originals, had settled. And from the age of ten or eleven I was allowed to accompany my mother on her pilgrimages to the Marlborough. Although Aunt Claribel died in 1929 at sixty-four, when I was only twelve, I remember her vividly. It would be hard not to. She was big, but one did not think of her as fat; Gertrude Stein correctly described her as "large."* She was strikingly handsome and she dressed strikingly. I recall her in black or white, in voluminous dresses specially constructed to reveal not so much as an ankle or à wrist and to make it impossible to guess at the shape beneath. Yet she managed to wear these extraordinary creations with style, setting off their monumental simplicity with a brilliant shawl and a huge brooch.

When I visited the Marlborough she took a keen interest in my reactions to the works of art and insisted that I should voice my opinions openly and honestly. (To Aunt Etta, on the other hand, it was wiser to express approval of what I liked but otherwise to keep silent.) On my first visit Aunt Claribel ordered that I was not to enter her apartment until she could accompany me herself, since she wanted to be present when I encountered Matisse's "Blue Nude." I don't think I disappointed her: I thought it was

* "They were large women, both of them, anybody could see them." From Gertrude Stein, "Two Women," in Barbara Pollack's *The Collectors: Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta Cone*. This book is the only full-length study of the sisters' life, and of the development of their collection.

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revolting, and I said so. (Later, this painting became a touchstone for my appreciation of post-impressionist art. On each successive visit I would try it again. I gradually found my initial revulsion turning into toleration and finally into real enjoyment—a development that I like to think Aunt Claribel foresaw.)

Long after her death, Aunt Claribel continues to amaze her family. Once I commented on a lovely little wash landscape in Aunt Etta's possession. It turned out to be Aunt Claribel's work. (I wish I knew what became of it.) And only recently, by accident, it was discovered that she was one of John Graham's earliest patrons. She bought a number of his drawings; he, in tribute, executed a pencil portrait that admirably caught the strength and the fineness of her face.

Aunt Etta was six years younger than Aunt Claribel, a little taller and almost as big. She was not so good-looking as her sister, but her Roman nose and firm jaw gave her equal distinction. She wore similar clothes, although she wore them with less style; her taste in dress, as in art, was much less daring. Where her sister was independent, brilliant and aggressive, she was painstaking and earnest. She never quite shed the timorousness of the Victorian maiden lady. My father told me that she used to look under her bed every night when she was a girl, and that once her older brothers constructed a guy out of old clothes and placed it where she would find it on her nightly search. It nearly scared her out of her wits, but I doubt whether it broke her of the habit. (Father, who was merely an interested spectator, was severely thrashed, since he was the only one my grandfather succeeded in catching.) Aunt Etta was not so quick with her tongue as her sister, but she was not to be trifled with, especially where her ideas of decorum were concerned. When a friend remarked that she could "never remember whether it's the 'w' or the 'h' in 'whore' that should be silent," Aunt Etta snapped back, "The whole word should be silent!" Although she was once caught laughing at a ribald music-hall skit, she excused herself on the grounds that it would have been rude not to join in her companions' obvious enjoyment.

After Aunt Claribel's death, Aunt Etta, who had always had

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strong family sentiments, felt even closer to her surviving relatives. Moreover, she enjoyed the company of young people, and she was especially kind to those among her numerous nephews, nieces and cousins who showed a willingness to come to terms with "modern art." The love of music that I shared with her gave me another claim on her affection. From my childhood on, she took a keen interest in my piano playing, and she arranged for her own teacher, Miss Cecilia Gaul (a pupil of Liszt!) to review my progress periodically. She herself enjoyed taking part in piano duets, and her library contained many transcriptions of classical symphonies and chamber works for this combination. When we read these together, as we often did, she insisted on playing *secondo,* since that was "the easy part"; unfortunately, whenever the going got rough she simply omitted the left hand, thereby depriving the music of its indispensable bass. But she was justly proud of the indisputable fact that she never "broke down": she always continued to count, and through thick and thin she valiantly kept going, with two hands or one.

When I went north to college, and later when I spent part of World War II near Baltimore at Fort Meade, I found myself an ever more frequent guest. Naturally, I became very familiar with the collection, so that Aunt Etta used to enjoy testing how long it would take me to spot a new acquisition. Yet I never entered the apartments without recapturing some of the wonder and amazement I had felt on my first visits as a child. At the same time, I never thought of "going to see the Cone Collection"; I was always "going to visit Aunt Etta." Other guests, unconnected with the family, have revealed similar reactions; they may have called on Aunt Etta in order to see her pictures, but what they experienced was a pleasant hour of conversation about art, with illustrative examples. She, on her part, was never just displaying a collection; she was also inviting her guests to share her delight in her treasures.

At the same time, she felt a responsibility both to the collection and to those who made the effort to see it: so far as possible it should remain complete at all times. It was for this reason, as much as for fear of theft or damage, that she seldom acceded to requests for loans. (Nor was she receptive to the suggestion that color re-

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productions be made of some of her paintings. "It cheapens them," she said. "People who wish to see them should be willing to go to some trouble.")

Aunt Etta's interest in the younger members of her family and her hospitality to them extended to their friends as well. I was always made to feel free to bring anyone with me, to invite anyone while I was there, or to send anyone armed with an introduction. I was, in short, tacitly invited to consider the Marlborough as an extension of my own home.

In the spring of 1933 Aunt Etta made a rash proposal to my parents: she would take my sister and me with her on her annual trip to Europe if Father would send Mother along in lieu of the trained nurse who usually accompanied her. After making sure that Aunt Etta, at sixty-two, really knew what it meant to travel with a nineteen-year-old girl and a sixteen-year-old boy, my parents agreed. Mother understood what Aunt Etta probably subconsciously realized, that she really wanted a companion more than a nurse. She was a hypochondriac, but she was actually quite healthy. Her ailments—nervous indigestion and occasional palpitations—would be diagnosed today as psychosomatic. She was, moreover, devoted to my mother; and she was sure, from her experiences with other young relatives, that she would enjoy showing Europe to Frances and me.

I think she did enjoy it; we certainly did. Naturally there was some friction, but all threatening crises were deftly averted by Mother's extraordinary tact, which I was of course too young to appreciate. She it was who explained to me that caviar, which had been served free on the *Statendam*, first class, was by no means free at restaurants; she it was who convinced Aunt Etta that Frances had meant no "impertinence" (a deadly sin) when she said that carrying Aunt Etta's hat box made her feel like an immigrant; she it was who made me stop correcting Aunt Etta's French. (Actually it had been Aunt Etta's idea that we should all correct one another. But fresh from high school, I knew all the rules and constantly tried to check Aunt Etta's flow of serviceable if ungrammatical French. Mother saw that this annoyed her and secretly put an end

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to it. Aunt Etta was greatly pleased at her apparent improvement. "I'm always a little rusty at the beginning of each summer," she explained.)

All this Mother quietly accomplished in addition to certain regular duties required of Aunt Etta's companion. She must pack and unpack. She must count the luggage six times at every stop—on the sidewalk, in the hotel lobby and in the rooms on arrival; the same in reverse on departure. She must decide which bed was nearer the wall and sleep in it. She must use *all* plumbing fixtures first.

It should be clear that traveling with Aunt Etta involved a great deal of ritual observance. Indeed, her trip was a ritual from beginning to end. She always sailed on the *Statendam*. She always had the same stateroom on her eastward voyages, and the corresponding room on the opposite side of the ship when returning. On landing in France she went immediately to Paris, where she always stayed at the Hôtel Lutétia—if not always in the same apartment, at least in one under the care of the same housekeeper, Mlle. Rachel. When she left town, whether for a day's excursion or for an extended trip, she always traveled in the big black Minerva of Raymond, a chauffeur who reserved his summers for Mlle. Cone.

Everyday life in Paris was largely governed by ritual. There were rules of time and precedence that determined exactly how one rose, bathed, breakfasted, dressed and prepared for the day, and similar ones that determined the procedures of retiring. In a restaurant (which was, except on special occasions, the *brasserie* of the Lutétia) we must ask for bottled water (because it was safe), ice (even though it wasn't), and two orders of butter. Dinner must include salad dressed with lemon juice instead of vinegar. Money must always be changed with the personal help of M. Auberjonois at the Bankers' Trust, but only after numerous telephone conversations to determine the most advantageous moment for the transaction. Shopping, a favorite occupation, was controlled by a complicated set of regulations that varied according to the nature of the articles sought: books, linens, embroideries, clothes, hats, handkerchiefs, handbags, toilet articles—down to toothpaste and soap. Fortunately, I was spared the necessity of learning just where and

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how and from whom each of these must be procured, since I was excused from most of the time-consuming expeditions required; but it was essential that either Mother or Frances be in attendance.

Then there were the social calls, paid and received, but mostly received. As I look back on it, there seems to have been an endless series of visitors in the apartment at the Lutétia: relatives young and old, American and German; art dealers and antique dealers; artists and art students; protégés and would-be protégés; museum men and musicians. And, of course, some genuine friends. Among these I must count Mlle. Hélène, the dressmaker, who alone seemed to understand what Aunt Etta called her "underground"—the complex system of skirts and underskirts, pockets and plackets, that she demanded. There was Ben Silbert, a skillful water-colorist whom Aunt Etta later commissioned to paint portraits of Mother and Frances. Matisse was in the south of France, but his daughter, Margot (Marguerite), and her husband, Georges Duthuit, were frequent guests. And above all, there were Aunt Etta's old friends the Steins.

The Steins at this period consisted of Gertrude's brothers, Michael and Leo, and their families, but not Gertrude. I do not know whether Gertrude had ever been as good a friend as Aunt Etta had believed her to be. At any rate, the two had drifted apart since the days when Aunt Etta had typed *Three Lives* as an act of devotion. By now they communicated rarely and saw one another not at all. There were at least two reasons for this. The intellectual and artistic estrangement between Gertrude and Leo had become a deep personal rift; according to Aunt Etta, Gertrude had never forgiven Leo for what she considered an unsuitable marriage. Aunt Etta had remained loyal to Leo, even though his wife had formerly been a well-known model whose reputation must have shocked Victorian sensibilities. But the deeper reason for Aunt Etta's disaffection (and perhaps one reason for her siding with Leo) was jealousy. At one time she had been very close to Gertrude; now she felt supplanted by Alice Toklas. Her thinly concealed dislike of Alice, evidently reciprocated, made even casual contact difficult.

During that summer of 1933 Aunt Etta was even less disposed than usual to feel warmly toward her former friend. Like others of

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her circle in Paris, she was incensed by certain passages in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* which was the literary sensation of the year. Her own resentment was due to no sense of injury. True, Gertrude had made her out to be a somewhat comical figure, laboriously typing *Three Lives* "letter by letter" because she had not been given specific permission to *read* the manuscript. But Aunt Etta was able to laugh at herself, and I suspect that she was proud of this testimony of Gertrude's to their former intimacy. What disturbed her was that the book brought to light certain long-buried incidents whose exposure to the public eye was bound to cause pain to some of her friends. No doubt this was thoughtless rather than malicious on Gertrude's part, but Aunt Etta found it unforgivable: "She can't resist showing off how much she knows."

Of course Aunt Etta's indignation did not affect her relations with Gertrude's brothers. We saw Leo and his wife, Nina, frequently, at first in Paris and later at their home near Florence. I was greatly disappointed when I met the celebrated "Nina de Montparnasse." The startling beauty and ravishing figure that had once made her the toast of the artists' quarter had long ago forsaken her; she was now fat and frowzy. It was obvious that she was good to Leo, but I could understand why Mother and Aunt Etta thought her "ordinary." Leo, on the other hand, was no disappointment at all. He was a fascinating talker, and I listened open mouthed to his egoistical and heretical pronouncements on art, literature, philosophy and religion. "The younger philosophers have at last come around to my views that everything is given meaning only by its context, and that nothing exists except as it is known." "Hardly anything in the Louvre seems to me worth looking at now." "Cézanne is no longer important to me, and that proves Keats didn't know what he was talking about. No work of art is a joy forever." Despite such generalizations, it was obvious that some of the old masters were still a joy to him; on the other hand, the only recent artist I recall hearing him praise was Othon Coubine, a minor painter whom we occasionally saw.

We were all enthralled, except for Mother, who thought Leo a brilliant "poseur." He won my heart completely when I found that he knew the lesser works of Lewis Carroll as well as I did. I don't

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know whether he won Frances's heart, but she won his: he still had an eye for youth and beauty, and I had to give him a copy of a photograph of her in her pajamas that I had taken one night.

Every Sunday Raymond drove us out to Garches to visit Michael Stein and his wife, Sally (Sarah), who lived in what looked to me like a square box but was really a famous house built for them by Le Corbusier. Here they lived, somewhat like Aunt Etta, amid Matisses, Picassos and Renaissance furniture. And here they served delicious teas that made Sundays a gastronomic treat to be anticipated with pleasure all week. I became very fond of Mr. and Mrs. Stein. She was especially warm and *sympathique*, and we formed a friendship that continued during the period of her widowhood in California.

The Stein ménage also included Mme. Gabrielle Osorio and her adoptive daughter, Jacqueline. Mme. Osorio was a woman of mystery to me—"Her husband was in French politics," they said, and that was all I ever knew; but Jac, who was my own age, was a delightful companion. She loved music, and she introduced me to *Le Sacre du printemps* through the original Stravinsky piano rolls, which we played on the old pianola. Also delightful was six-year-old Daniel, the Steins' grandson, whose bilingual ability fascinated me. He lived with his grandparents in the suburbs while his parents, Allan and Yvonne Stein, ran a perfume shop in the city. (Yvonne, who had been a ballerina at the Paris opera, radiated all the glamor that Nina had lost.)

It may seem surprising that, in the midst of such a busy life, Aunt Etta found time to show us Paris, but she did, and she was an admirable cicerone. We received an education in art, one by no means limited to the new. Despite Leo's judgment, we spent many days at the Louvre, amid the Italian and Dutch masters, the romantics and the impressionists. And when we left Paris on the extended automobile trip that had become part of the summer ritual, she announced that we would visit such art centers as Florence and Venice. (She would have liked to take me to Salzburg, but she was afraid to cross the Austrian border. The previous summer she had somehow got away with refusing to declare how much money she

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was bringing into Austria—for fear that Raymond might find out —and now she was sure that the officials were lying in wait for her.) Our destination was to be Lucerne, where she always spent two or three weeks. Cousin Siegfried Rosengart, art dealer, good friend and trusted adviser, had his gallery there.

Nice, however, was our immediate goal, since it was the home of "M'sieu Matisse." Aunt Etta, whose accent in French was as personal as her grammar, tried thus to clip "Monsieur" in colloquial fashion; it came out something like "Misha" or "Musha." But however she pronounced the title, she worshiped the man. She would hardly have dared call him a close friend, but she basked in his esteem, knowing that he respected her taste and considered her one of his most perceptive collectors. The summer would not have been complete without at least an attempt on her part to see him.

Accordingly, off to the Midi we drove, by way of Tours, Poitiers, Biarritz, Carcassonne, Albi and Toulouse. Our schedule was carefully laid out day by day to be religiously observed. But we had to break it twice: once owing to car trouble, and once owing to M'sieu Matisse.

On our arrival in Nice—a few days late, because of the Minerva's breakdown outside Toulouse—we discovered that Matisse had been ill, but that he expected to see Aunt Etta nevertheless. So she rolled away grandly in the huge limousine to call on the great man, while the rest of us took the afternoon off on the beach. When Aunt Etta returned to the hotel we could see that she was in a state of high elation—"bubbling over like a schoolgirl," said Mother. M'sieu Matisse, in spite of his recent illness, had done much more than grant her a brief audience. In the first place, he had arranged a lovely surprise: the model for Aunt Etta's recently acquired *La Robe jaune* was seated at the window, in her yellow dress, exactly as in the picture. But then Matisse had crowned Aunt Etta's pleasure: he had insisted that we stay an extra day in Nice so that he could meet us, and so that we could all see the original version of his mural for the Barnes Collection. This was not yet finished, for in the course of painting it the artist had discovered that its dimensions were wrong. It was now housed in a sort of barn, awaiting completion; and Margot, who was to arrive the next day,

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would take us to see it. After that we were to pay our respects to him. For Aunt Etta this was a command, one that she gladly obeyed even though it meant totally abandoning our already battered schedule, and one in which we eagerly acquiesced.

The mural—like the version at the Barnes Museum, a composition of huge dancing nudes, but stronger and less graceful—made a tremendous impression on all of us. Aunt Etta said simply, "*Je suis comblée,*" and that expressed what we all felt. So it was with a real sense of the honor being bestowed on us that we paid our call on the master and his wife.

The apartment, with its red tile floors and sunny windows, was familiar from many paintings. Mme. Matisse, kind and motherly, greeted us warmly and plied us with tea until her husband was ready for us. He proved to be most genial, talking volubly about his recent kidney stones, the climates of France and North Carolina, and his hopes that the mural we had just seen might one day rest in a specially built Cone Museum. Then the doctor arrived and we had to leave, Aunt Etta's spirits only slightly dampened by the realization that even if she could some day afford the expense of granting Matisse's wish, she would probably lack the energy for such an undertaking.

But she did have the energy for sight-seeing in Florence and Venice—plus an uncanny memory that enabled her to proceed with unerring accuracy to the right altarpiece in the right church. That was before the days of spotlighting, but she knew the exact hour when the sun would illuminate Palma Vecchio's Saint Barbara in Santa Maria Formosa. She would certainly have disapproved of the modern system whereby a coin in a slot machine produces full artificial lighting at any time.

From Italy we proceeded to Lucerne, where we spent several quiet weeks. While there, Aunt Etta received from Gertrude a cordial invitation for the four of us to take lunch with her on our way back to Paris. Gertrude was summering with Alice near Aix-les-Bains, and it would have been very easy for us to make a short detour. Of course Mother, Frances and I were eager to accept, but Aunt Etta would have none of it. The reason she gave Gertrude was that the visit would take us out of our way—a patent excuse

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that Gertrude must have seen through. Aunt Etta declared to Mother that the real reason for her refusal was that Gertrude wasn't worthy of meeting us! Naturally, we felt differently, but there was nothing we could say. We motored straight to Paris, where we spent the rest of the summer.

As a result, we never did meet Gertrude. When she was in New York the following year, I telephoned her from my nearby boarding school on a dare from some friends. She was cordial, inquiring about Aunt Etta and the other Cones, and wanting to know which one I looked like; but she did not respond to my suggestion that I might call on her.

It was now her turn to refuse an invitation. Her itinerary was to include several days in Baltimore, but she rather bluntly declined Aunt Etta's offer of hospitality. My aunt faced that situation by leaving town before Gertrude arrived. She paid a midwinter visit to North Carolina instead of her usual spring trip—a departure from ritual that nearly resulted in her death. The sleeping car between Baltimore and Greensboro was dependably drafty in those days, and Aunt Etta caught a cold that turned into a serious bout of pneumonia. But she had avoided the discomfort of a possible confrontation—or the humiliation of a snub.

The threat of war and its arrival forced Aunt Etta to suspend her trips to Europe. Afterward, she no longer felt strong enough to undertake the voyage. During the war my father had died, and so had Uncle Fred (who had continued to live with her at the Marlborough). Now she herself was in failing health and it was obvious that soon the only surviving Original would be Uncle Bernard in Greensboro.

Her last few summers were largely spent with us in the mountains of North Carolina. Mother vacationed at Blowing Rock in a huge rustic house that saw a constant flow of family and friends. It was big enough for one suite of rooms to be reserved for Aunt Etta and her friend Lilly Schwarz, a pianist who had become Aunt Etta's musical mentor after the death of Miss Gaul, and was now her almost constant companion. Such an arrangement entailed inevitable strain, but it was mitigated, as usual, by Mother's

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diplomacy—and by the presence of Frances's small daughter, to whose charms our aunt was highly susceptible.

It distressed us all to see Aunt Etta growing obviously weaker, but we nevertheless enjoyed many amusing and enlightening conversations. We had known, for example, that her Electra complex had been centered on Orestes rather than on Agamemnon, but we had not understood the extent of her own realization of the fact until she revealed to us that Mahonri Young, the sculptor, had asked her to marry him. "Why didn't you?" asked my sister. "Because I never met a man who was the equal of Brother Moses," was the prompt reply.

It was during this period that she explained to me why she had not seized the opportunity of buying Picasso's picture of a nude boy leading a horse: "The only place I could have hung it was in the dining room, and you wouldn't have wanted to eat looking at —at *that*, would you?"* (As it was, her guests ate looking at a large catch of apparently dead fish, in Matisse's oil of the beach at Étretat. But these fish, she claimed, were alive; M'sieu Matisse had paid a little boy to keep them watered while he painted them.)

Gertrude was, of course, a frequent topic. On the whole, Aunt Etta was much mellower than formerly and talked about her old friend without rancor. She insisted, however, that it was Leo, and not Gertrude, who had developed the real eye for modern art and hence had contributed significantly to her own education. "But remember," she would always say, "the Cone Collection began before that. The first pictures were the Theodore Robinsons that I bought for my parents' house in 1898."

She had even come to feel guilty about her refusal of Gertrude's luncheon invitation so many years before. More than once she said to me, "I don't remember just why we couldn't accept." Each time I would dutifully reply, "Because it would have taken us too far out of our way." That always satisfied her until she thought of it again.

* According to Ellen B. Hirschland, in her essay, "The Cone Sisters and the Stein Family" *(Four Americans in Paris)*, "Etta measured her rooms and found that the painting was too high. . . ." The reasons are not incompatible: the painting might have been too high for every room except the dining room. Or perhaps she was unwilling to reveal the real reason at the time.

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To my sister she once mentioned something that had been troubling her for some time. "You know, Frances, people say that there was something *between* Gertrude and Alice, but I never believed it. After all, what can two women *do?*" On this point Frances wisely professed ignorance.

Aunt Etta died in Blowing Rock in August, 1949, just after having purchased from Allan Stein the portrait that Picasso had painted of him as a child. That gouache, the last acquisition of the Cone Collection, never joined its companions at the Marlborough. By the time it arrived, arrangements were already being made by the new owners of the collection, the Baltimore Museum of Art, to dismantle the apartments. The pictures, the statues, the furniture, the rugs, the jewelry, the lace, the textiles—everything judged of museum quality was, according to the terms of Aunt Etta's will, to be housed in a special wing of the Baltimore Museum to be constructed for the purpose.

The wing is now built and much of the collection is handsomely installed; but for those of us who knew the old Marlborough, what we now see is not the Cone Collection. In the museum one can look at a number of choice items under ideal conditions, but for the fortunate initiates the Cone Collection will always be what they remember: a fascinating jumble of old furniture and new art, crowded together in cramped quarters where an Italian altarcloth protected the mantelpiece, a Degas dancer stood on the piano and a Bauchant oil hung beneath a Picasso-Villon print on the bathroom wall. Above all, the Cone Collection will always be the vivid expression of the personalities of two unforgettable women.*

In the summer of 1951 I returned to Paris for a short visit. I looked up a number of old acquaintances, including Margot Matisse Duthuit. To my delighted surprise, she informed me that her father remembered me very well and wished to see me. I was to make an appointment through "Mlle. Lydia"—for Matisse had left his long-suffering wife to spend his remaining years with a young model.

* I understand that the Baltimore Museum is now planning to reproduce a "Marlborough Room" as a permanent part of its exhibition of the Cone Collection.

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They were living in an apartment house on the Boulevard Montparnasse. I ascended to the top floor in a rickety elevator suspended in the old stair well. When I rang the bell, I was greeted by a young woman who reminded me vaguely of Nina Stein—or was it just the association of ideas? She ushered me into the tiny apartment and told me to wait. I had very little time to look around, however—just enough to realize that most of the works of art were by the master himself, except for a few pieces of what looked like Romanesque sculpture. M'sieu Matisse came out of the bedroom almost immediately. He looked very old and very weary, and his stomach was hugely distended (or could he have been that fat?), but his eye had a humorous twinkle that I remembered from Nice. He greeted me warmly, for I was the first to bring him a personal report of Mlle. Cone's last days. I told him what I could about Aunt Etta, and about the disposition of the collection. He was, of course, keenly interested in the museum's plans; perhaps he was still thinking of his hopes for a Cone Museum that would house the great mural. Most of all, though, he wanted to indulge in reminiscences about my aunts, of whom he must have been genuinely fond. His memory for detail was extraordinary: he recalled, for instance, a special kind of apple from Brother Moses' orchard in North Carolina that he had been served in Baltimore over twenty years before.

Then he asked me about my own work. What were music students like? Were they as impatient as young painters, wanting to strike out for themselves before they had achieved a sound technique? I assured him that they were. He became quite excited: "Yes, yes! These young people think they can begin where Picasso and I left off! They don't realize that if they want to build on our work, they have to go through the same kind of discipline that we went through."

I suggested that in music, at least, a thorough grounding in the classics offered the best foundation for development as a composer. "In art too," he replied, "you have to study the classics, you have to know your own tradition. Otherwise you have nothing to react against."

There was one question I had been wanting to ask him for a

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long time. I had once read of his visiting the aged Renoir, who was so crippled with arthritis that he had to tie the brush to his hand in order to paint. Matisse, according to the story, had asked, "Why do you continue to paint, Master, when it costs you so much pain?" To which Renoir had replied, "The pain passes, but the beauty remains." The story had always seemed to me *ben trovato—troppo ben trovato,* really. Now I could find out whether it was *vero.*

He laughed. "Renoir would never have said a thing like that. He was a very simple man who didn't make fine phrases. But once he did say something much better. He said, 'When I stop painting, I shall die'."

At this point Mlle. Lydia reappeared, and it was obvious that she was afraid I might tire the old man. I took my leave and rang for the elevator. M'sieu Matisse stuck his head out of the door and with a wry smile explained, "The elevator doesn't come up to take you down, it only goes down to bring you up." Then he withdrew his head and closed the door, and I walked down the stairs.

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Climbing

RICHARD SHELTON

the age of consent
is a sad story
and I don't want to hear about it

I feel very old tonight
almost beyond the point
where youth and beauty can hurt me

but the broken moon
hangs out there
like half a golden egg
not willing to give itself
for nothing
while the big dipper pours
huge streams of darkness over us

light of my life
wherever you flicker
look down on my ruined face
it has come of age

at last I know what to do
and where to go to do it
so let them envy me

I know about the faulty
rung in the ladder
and I am climbing
fast as I can

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JONATHAN LANG

The Fish

Are our shadows that swim
The world in search of us
Peering through the black brim
Of sea we do not trust
Are rulers of the dark
We dare not have but want
Are the power of shark
We want to be but can't
Are the black glide of blood
Rivering over bone
Feeding the darkening flood
That whispers of our ruin

Are walking the sand
While we sleep

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Heroic Ethnocentrism: The Idea of Universality in Literature

CHARLES R. LARSON

I HAVE BEEN DISTURBED FOR SOME TIME NOW about a concept frequently used in classroom discussions of literature and in critical interpretations of the written word: the idea of universality. In part, my questionings of this concept are the result of teaching students overseas, in Africa, and spending a number of years studying the emergence of contemporary African fiction. Certainly if there is any one thing that I have learned as the result of these two experiences, it is that our concept of universality rarely takes into consideration the experiential aspects of a culture that may, indeed, shape our interpretations of a piece of literature. What an African experiences when he reads a piece of literature is often not what we who are "Western" experience, and vice versa.

In the fall of 1962, when I began teaching English literature to high school students in Nigeria, I encountered a number of stumbling blocks, which I had in no way anticipated—all of them cultural, experiential. This was not a matter of science or technology and their various by-products as I had anticipated ("What is a flush toilet?") but, rather, matters related to what I have learned to call culturally restricted materials. It was enough, to be sure, just for my African students to read through a 450-page Victorian novel (required reading in those days for the British-administered school certificate examinations); and, as I later learned, in the lower levels at least, students were accustomed to taking several months or even the greater part of a year to read through and discuss the plot line of a single novel. Length alone was enough to get them, since English was their second language

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and the problem of vocabulary was especially troublesome. But once the problems of language, vocabulary and verbosity had been overcome, reading through the words became a less difficult process than understanding what the words themselves related—the "experience of literature" as we are wont to say.

"Excuse me, sir, what does it mean 'to kiss'?" That was a much more difficult question to answer than the usual ones relating to the plot or the characters of the novel—a real shock when it was brought to my attention that I had a rather naïve boy in my class. So I brushed the question off until it was repeated a number of times and I slowly began to realize that all of my students had no real idea of what it meant to kiss. This seemed an extremely odd thing to me because most of my students were upper-form boys in their late teens—some in their early twenties—and I had, of course, heard them talking on occasion about their girl friends. It was also rumored that several of the boys were married, although by school regulations they were not supposed to be. Nevertheless, that question and others of a like nature kept recurring—in part, no doubt, because we were reading Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Why did Hardy's characters get so flustered when they were kissed (or more likely, when they weren't kissed)? When I asked one of the European-educated African teachers why my students always seemed ready to return to that same question, I was more than surprised to learn that Africans, traditionally at least, do not kiss; to learn that what I thought was "natural" in one society is not natural at all, but *learned*, that is, cultural. Not all peoples kiss. Or, stated more appropriately, not all peoples have learned to kiss. (When I later attended American movies with Africans, I could understand why the audience often went into hysterics at the romantic scenes in the films.)

How was one to read a Thomas Hardy novel with all those frustrated kisses without ever having been kissed? How was I to explain something like this to my African students? Or, to limit my experience to a more technical matter concerning the novel's form which also perplexed my students, what about those long passages of description for which Hardy is so celebrated? My African students couldn't understand what page after page of descrip-

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tion of the countryside had to do with the plot of the novel. What they had given me, as I later learned, was another clue to the differing ways in which culture shapes our interpretations of literature. It was not until I seriously began studying the African novel itself, however, that I could put all of those pieces together; just as the questions about those kisses revealed something about my African students' cultural background, so too, did their concern about the descriptive passages of Hardy's book. The fact that descriptive passages were virtually nonexistent in African fiction initially seemed particularly puzzling to me, since the first generation of African Anglophone novelists, at least, had been brought up almost entirely on the Victorian novel. Whereas other elements of the Victorian novel had found their way into the African novel, description had not. Could it be that this omission in the African novel revealed something basically different between African and Western attitudes toward nature, toward one's environment?

Kissing and description, attitudes toward love and nature—are these attitudes *so* different for the African? Is the African way of life less sophisticated than our own? Or is the belief that these supposedly "universal" attitudes should be the same as ours the naïve one? Is this what we really mean when we talk about "universality" in literature—if someone does not react to something in our literature the same way that we do, then he is to be considered inferior? Perhaps the term itself is meaningless. After all, people love and die in every culture. Their reactions to these events in their lives, however, may be significantly different from our own. And these reactions, in turn, shape their interpretations of literature.

For the most part, the term "universal" has been grossly misused when it has been applied to non-Western literature, because it has so often been used in a way that ignores the multiplicity of cultural experiences. Usually, when we try to force the concept of universality on someone who is not Western, I think we are implying that our own culture should be the standard of measurement. Why else would we expect all peoples to react in the same way that we do? It is for this reason too, that I feel that Afro-

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American writers in the United States and in the Caribbean have a strong case when they argue that black experience—even in the Western world—is different from white experience and that black art should not be evaluated in the same ways as "white" art. (This can become little more than mere rhetoric, however, if the black artist does not articulate what the black artistic experience is.) But let us return to those so-called universal experiences of *all* literature and illustrate some of the ways in which they may be radically different—at least for the African.

In his preface to Tsao Hsueh-Chin's eighteenth-century Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber,* Mark Van Doren says, "The greatest love stories have no time or place." I frankly doubt this, in spite of other Western literary critics, who have also said that the most common theme in literature is love. (Leslie Fiedler, in his *Collected Essays,* for instance.) After reading dozens and dozens of contemporary African novels, I can in no way accept Van Doren's or Fiedler's assertions. There is at least one whole section of the world where the love story is virtually nonexistent. I can think of no contemporary African novel in which the central plot or theme can be called a "love story," no African novel in which the plot line progresses because of the hero's attempt to acquire a mate, no African novel in which seduction is the major goal, no African novel in which the fate of the lovers becomes the most significant element in the story. No African novel works this way because love as a theme in a Western literary sense is simply missing. Romantic love, seduction, sex—these are not the subjects of African fiction. In fact, in most contemporary African novels women play minor parts; the stories are concerned for the most part with a masculine world. There may be marriage, bride price and an occasional tête à tête, but that is not the concern of the novel: it is always something else. There are no graphic descriptions of erotic love, there are no kisses, no holding hands. There is, in short, no love story as we have come to think of it in Western fiction. Not even the unrequited lover pining away. African fiction simply is not made of such stuff.

This does not mean that Africans do not fall in love with one another. It simply means that they are not preoccupied with

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romance in the way that our own writers are. Marriage is for procreation, not for love, and, traditionally at least, marriages were arranged. One gets married to have children—the more the better—because children are an assurance that the cycle of life will be continued. And if the African is an animist, children are his assurance that when he dies there will still be people living who will worship their ancestors, including *him*. So children are a necessity, and often a marriage is not considered binding until proof of fertility has been established. Worked out fictively, these cultural beliefs and practices clearly alter the concept of love and romance in the African novel (and in African poetry and drama), negating the importance of romantic love (nearly eliminating it, as I have said) and increasing the importance of the children, of childbearing. This is not to imply that every good African novel ends with the birth of a child—far from it. It simply means that marriage is taken for granted, and the relationship between the male and female characters is assumed also, placing an emphasis on something else, on what the African may consider more important matters. (It is, of course, impossible for these statements to hold true for every single African novel. I can think of one exception in the canon of contemporary African fiction where erotic love plays a significant part—in the second and third novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, a Ghanaian novelist whose characters have been highly westernized, like Armah himself.) The important fact here is that in dozens and dozens of African novels the romantic element is missing. And, conversely—lest we have forgotten this—the African reading a Western novel cannot understand why such a fuss is made about getting the lovers together.

Western romance is only one theme that may puzzle the African reader. He may have trouble understanding the lack of concern about death in some Western novels, too. Or, what is more likely, the Western reader may totally miss the significance of a death in a piece of African fiction that he is reading. A. Alvarez, in his fine book, *The Savage God*, says that "perhaps half the literature of the world is about death." Yet our society has worked so hard to neutralize the shock of death that it is quite possible for us to miss the emotional overtones of a piece of African writing in which

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death occurs. Sembene Ousmane's celebrated short story, "Black Girl," ("La noire de . . .") is one such example. The story concerns a young Senegalese girl, named Diouana, who moves to Antibes when the French family she has worked for in Senegal returns to France. Ousmane begins his story by projecting us into Diouana's thoughts, illustrating her excitement and fascination at being able to have such a wonderful experience: the chance to live in France. But Diouana's dreams shortly become a nightmare. Overworked, isolated from her fellow Africans, called a "nigger" by the four children in the French family, after some months Diouana commits suicide by slashing her wrists in the bathtub. The Western reader may think that Ousmane's story is simply another rather melodramatic account of racial prejudice—which it is, in part. But it is also a story about modern slavery, and what that situation will drive the sane person into doing: taking his own life. Just as slaves jumped overboard to their deaths in the ocean in order to escape slavery in the New World, Diouana takes her own life to find release from her own enslaved situation. But this is only a part of it, for in committing suicide—one of the strongest taboos in many African societies—she has only temporarily released herself. She has trapped her ancestors, broken the cycle of life, and, if she is an only child, she has ended the family lineage. She has, in short, committed a terrible abomination, and the African reading the conclusion to Ousmane's story is horrified by what she has done. It is, therefore, the religious overtone relating to ancestral worship that the Western reader will probably be completely unaware of.

The power of the ancestors in relation to life and death is articulated—perhaps more clearly for the Western reader—in Birago Diop's short story, "Sarzan." In this story, an African returns to his native village after several years as a soldier overseas. Determined to civilize his villagers, he sets out to destroy the sacred village idols. But the ancestral spirits take possession of his mind and drive him insane. In his madness he says:

> Listen to things
> More often than beings

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Hear the voice of fire
Hear the voice of water
Listen in the wind to
The sighs of the bush
This is the ancestors breathing.

Those who are dead are not ever gone
They are in the darkness that grows lighter
And in the darkness that grows darker
The dead are not down in the earth
They are in the trembling of the trees
In the moaning of the woods
In the water that runs
In the water that sleeps,
They are in the hut, they are in the crowd.

The power of the ancestors is so strong that it thwarts Sarzan's plans for desecration of the sacred fetishes and drives him mad—the dead who are not dead but alive in the trees, the water, the fire. There is obviously an attitude toward death here that is most untypically Western, again illustrating the difficulty an African has in understanding our own concept of death wherein once a person is deceased, he is virtually forgotten. In Africa the dead cannot be forgotten: they control the destinies of those who are still alive.

More important in Sarzan's chant—and this relates back to my earlier statement that my African students were puzzled by the descriptive passages in Thomas Hardy's novel—is the attitude expressed toward one's environment—nature. The African does not see the natural world around him as something that he is removed from—as we do in the West—but as something he is a part of. The piece of wood used for the carving of a mask is sacred because it incorporates the spirit of the ancestors—a part of the chain of life. The African does not think that nature is something he is separate from; for the African there is no ontological gap. He is every bit as much a part of the natural world as his environment is a part of him—and hence, like love, nature is something that is taken for granted. So why does it need to be described in a novel? If a jungle is necessary in an African story (in the novels by Amos

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Tutuola, for example), it is simply mentioned as a matter of function. Mentioned, but very rarely described. So it is with almost all African writing, and the Western reader should not be startled by the sparsity of description (of nature and all other objects, as far as that goes, including other human beings) in an African novel, or by the infrequency of African poems that depict nature in the romantic way. (Time and space are often treated in a way contrary to Western measurements, too.)

I am aware that I have been talking about two characters (Diouana and Sarzan) who are isolated figures, and yet I suggested earlier that isolation in African literature is another theme that does not usually fit into the typical Western pattern. I would like to go a step further and say that isolation as a theme in African fiction is a red herring, unless the character has become trapped because of extraordinary circumstances. Clearly Diouana is one such example, because she is in France, cut off from her people. If she were in Africa she would never have committed suicide; if the situation had become intolerable, she simply would have quit her job. Sarzan is another exception because he, too, has been trapped by his exposure to the Western world. What is worse, he has consciously rejected his own cultural values and his own people—something Diouana didn't do. In a way, then, Sarzan's isolation is voluntary, self-inflicted in a manner one will never encounter in an African novel that does not place so much emphasis on the clash between Africa and the West. I would like to suggest that isolation as a theme is missing from the traditional African world, which is oriented toward the group instead of the individual, and the mere idea of picturing the African character cut off from his group is an anomaly in itself.

The hero concept—the belief in the individual who is different from his fellowmen—is, therefore, almost totally alien to African life; and, as an extension of this, the hero in contemporary African fiction is for the most part nonexistent. The hero is almost nonexistent in contemporary Western literature, too, but his descendant, the anti-hero, the isolated figure, is very much a force to be reckoned with. This is not true of African fiction, however. Rather, it is the group-felt experience that is all-important: what

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happens to the village, the clan, the tribe. What the African novelist has most usually been concerned with is the situation that has changed the group by the end of the story. The result may be called the "situational" African novel, dealing not with an individual character—except as a possible mirror of the group—but the group of people whose lives are altered because of the common situation they have undergone. Almost any Anglophone African novel of the first generation will do here as an example: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* wherein a village undergoes the initial exposure to westernization and gives in to the more powerful force, or James Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* in which an entire nation is torn asunder by the rise of Mau Mau as an African counterforce to put down the colonial power. In each of these novels, to a certain extent, there is one character around whom most of the action is centered, but in each case the result of the experience depicted in the story is felt by the whole group. Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart,* commits suicide because his fellow villagers will not rally behind him and fight the British colonial government. To do so, they realize, would be suicide for all of them, and Okonkwo's fate should not be regarded as tragic—as most Western critics have interpreted it—but retrogressive, anything but visionary.

Admittedly, the situation in one manner or another in all of the works I have cited thus far is that of the African world under exposure to the West, for this has been the most common theme of all contemporary African writing: Africa meeting the West. I have a strong feeling that there were heroes, or individuals, in traditional African life, but the need for survival reinforced the age-old traditions of group solidarity when African societies became exposed to the West. This exposure may be thought of as a kind of war—two groups of people fighting against each other—which is a collective experience in itself. For this reason I feel that the conflict in African fiction is often that of the "collective consciousness" facing potential destruction by Western life. At stake in each of the works I have mentioned are the age-old traditions of an African group—one more attempt by the West to make all peoples in the world alike. Perhaps this is the theme (and cen-

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tral conflict) of all emergent literature. In Hyemeyohsts Storm's brilliant novel of American Indian life, *Seven Arrows,* one of his characters says, " 'The whitemen are determined to destroy all People whose ways do not reflect their own'." The pull away from the collective consciousness is often so strong, so tempting, so seductive, that many Africans (like Sarzan) have been unable to resist it. Only when they have been cut off from traditional African life do they realize how superficial the new world is. By that time, however, as in Diouana's case, it is too late. As Leopold Sedar Senghor has said, by that time they are "cultural half-castes." Only at that stage does the theme of isolation (in a Western sense) enter into African writing, an isolation that comes about because the life-giving roots of tribal life have been severed.

There are descendants of the situational novel among the works written by black writers in the New World, and it is the frequency of this same kind of subcategory of the novel that again presents a strong argument for the distinctness of Afro-American literature in the New World. These works represent not so much a genetic throwback to a previous stage as the black American writer's belonging to the African collective consciousness, strongly implying that the situation of the black man meeting the white man is not so very different in the New World from what it has been in Africa. There is still a basic cultural clash—with one group being told that its own heritage is inferior to that of the other. What seems to me so important here is the frequency of the situational plot in novels written by black American and black Caribbean writers.

Jacques Roumaine's *Masters of the Dew (Gouverneurs de la Rosée)* is a perfect example—a work which in its plot line parallels that of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In Roumaine's case, however, the world he depicts is many years later in the black/white clash than Achebe's, which is, roughly, concerned with the 1890s. In Roumaine's novel, when the main character, Manuel, returns to his Haitian village after working ten years in the sugar fields of Cuba, he discovers that his village has been torn apart by a feud that has split the community in two. Moreover, the village has been suffering for some time from a drought that has reduced

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all the villagers to a common state of poverty. After some time, Manuel is successful in discovering a spring in the highlands; and this discovery, he hopes, will unite the villagers once again—all will work together to build irrigation ditches for watering the village. But Manuel does not live to see the fruits of his dreams; he is killed in what we are led to believe will be the last vendetta in the senseless village feud. His death, a kind of purification, unites the village—restores, we might say, the collective consciousness. And, ironically, the West, in the form of Manuel's technical knowledge about irrigation, has been used to unite a people rather than to disperse them.

What is significant is that Roumaine's novel, although focusing in part on Manuel himself, is actually the story of a community just as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is the story of Okonkwo's village, Umuofia. The final section of *Masters of the Dew* is called "The End and the Beginning," emphasizing the restoration of the collective consciousness. Once again the net result of the community-shared experience has been felt more directly by a group of people than by an individual. The same may be said of George Lamming's powerful work, *In the Castle of My Skin,* wherein Lamming goes so far as to break convention with the autobiography he is ostensibly writing, and instead tells the story of a village and its eventual destruction—once again because of the onslaught of the West. As the work develops, the narrative becomes further and further removed from the autobiographical, until in the end Lamming has made a case for the need for black power wherever black people are living. Whole sections of his work are oriented toward communal events in Lamming's successful depiction of an entire village (in Barbados) undergoing the remaining stages of colonialism. By the time the last page of the book has been turned, it is difficult to say who the central character is. One thing is clear, however, and that is that the colonial situation has changed Lamming's community forever.

To cite only one work by an Afro-American writer in which the black collective consciousness (which we may further call the African heritage) is the prime concern is, of course, a slight to black writing in the United States, but limitations of space neces-

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sitate this. The example I will use is Jean Toomer's highly experimental novel, *Cane* (1923), perhaps the most perfect example of the collective consciousness as the main focus of the black novel, since in *Cane* there is no unity of time, place, or character. Instead, the main focus is the black man's lost heritage and the offshoots of that experience in slavery in the United States. Toomer's novel is divided into three parts: the first set in the South, the second in the North, and the third in the South again. Part one presents the aftereffects of slavery in the South, by relating the stories of a number of women whose lives are empty, frustrated, unfulfilled. Toomer alternates his development with poems and prose tales. Part two dwells upon the same idea, frustrated lives, but this time in the North, again giving us the stories of a handful of differing characters. Part three returns to the South, and this time the narrative is told in dramatic form. Again a number of characters are introduced, each one living an unfulfilled life. What holds Toomer's "novel" together—what gives it its unity—is his use of imagery, especially the imagery of the setting sun, the dying sun of slavery. Almost all of Toomer's characters have tried to obliterate their heritage of slavery, and it is clear that Toomer believes that no people can build a strong community if they reject their collective past, their heritage, no matter how horrible it may have been. Father John in part three of *Cane* articulates these ideas when he talks about the white man's sin: making the Bible lie by claiming a justification for slavery. But black people have sinned too, by trying to hide their slave origins in America. Until they come to grips with this past (their collective consciousness), there will be nothing but sterility and emptiness. There will only be the defeated situation itself: slavery and its aftermath in America, which is not so very different from colonialism in Africa.

If I have belabored these comments on the situational black novel it is because I believe that ultimately form and content may be reshaped by culturally restricted materials: the situational novel, whether in Africa or the New World, is most frequently typified by a looseness of structure, a de-emphasis of character to the extent that there may be no central character at all. In the

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case of African fiction, because it is based on widely differing attitudes toward life and death, love and marriage, and an orientation toward the group instead of the individual, it seems even clearer that culture will be the determining factor in shaping one's interpretation of a piece of literature.

One begins to wonder if two peoples as widely different as Africans and westerners will ever be able to read each other's literature and fully understand it. This is not, however, the question I started out to ask. Literature is not so limiting that only one interpretation is possible. We cannot all be both African and westerner, black and Caucasian. What is important, it seems to me, is that when we read a piece of non-Western literature we realize that the interpretation we make of it may be widely different from what the artist intended, and contrarily, that we should not expect people who are not of our own culture and heritage to respond in the same way that we do to our own literature. The time has come when we should avoid the use of the pejorative term "universal." What we really mean when we talk about universal experiences in literature are cultural responses that have been shaped by our own Western tradition.

Although most of the examples I have used in this essay are African in origin, I would hazard a final conjecture that the experience of other non-Western literatures (Chinese and Japanese, for example) will also support this belief that the word "universal" is, indeed, limited. This is clearly the thesis of Makoto Ueda's *Literary and Art Theories in Japan;* Ueda takes great pains to prove that the word "universal" is a Western Literary term. The concept of universality also appears to be inappropriate in discussing Hyemeyohsts Storm's *Seven Arrows*, mentioned earlier. Storm has written a fascinating novel which in many ways defies normal fictional categorization and analysis. For better or for worse, each of us was born into an ethnocentrically sealed world. The purpose of any piece of literature, no matter what culture it was produced in, is to show us something we were previously unaware of. Just as literature is a bridge connecting a life lived with a life not lived, so, too, all literature that is effective is a voyage into a previously untraveled world.

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PHILOSOPHY

James Feibleman's Two-Story World

HUNTINGTON CAIRNS

Intellectual and cultural maturity were a long time coming to the United States. The early chapters of American history are filled mostly with the dismal account of copies of European originals. Not until the twentieth century was there anything approaching an indigenous and vigorous native growth. Today of course American names appear with predictable frequency in the Nobel awards. American artists (most notably the school of New York) influence the world scene; American novels fascinate Europe. America is finally exerting a cultural force to equal her physical force.

There is one great exception in this picture of sophisticated intellectual development—philosophy. American philosophy is dominated by European thought; it is monolithic, rigid to the extent that it becomes a sterile exercise for the classroom, highly technical and very limited in its audience. American philosophers usually belong to one of three schools: logical positivism, the English school of ordinary language, continental existentialism.

Briefly, these are the differences. Logical positivism (which owes its existence to Ludwig Wittgenstein) asks that philosophy confine its efforts to serving as a handmaiden to the scientists, endeavoring only to clarify the meaning of the experimental method and to interpret its results. It is a real curiosity: a philosophy that denies the importance of philosophy. The English school of ordinary language (which also owes its existence to Wittgenstein) believes that the purpose of philosophy is to get rid of some of the philosophical confusions caused by the uses of language. The continental existentialists, most notably Sartre and Heidegger, are sure that philosophy ought to be a way of talking about private anxieties, as though our very existence was a cosmic predicament, and the question asked by Hamlet, "to be or not to be," raised an issue that is still in some doubt.

Such are the fashionable schools in America today—and they are also, for practical purposes, without any real influence. Most educated people scarcely know what philosophy is and where it fits into the scheme of things. In bookstores it occupies a small part of the shelf headed "Religion." Even our literature is unaffected by it. How many current American novelists could say with Dostoevsky that he needed his copy of Hegel, or with Proust that he had been heavily influenced by Leibniz and Bergson? Today the educated man who is at the same time not a professional looks in vain for philosophers who can cope with the bewildering state of modern knowledge and formulate his position for him in terms that might serve to make it more intelligible and therefore more bearable.

Perhaps in response to his unspoken demands there are beginning indications of the rise of another school—or more accurately the rebirth of a classical one: Realism, the classical kind of comprehensive and systematic philosophy, promotes the study not of the mind but of the world, and of the mind only as a part of that world. The representatives of realism in the past gen-

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eration count among their numbers some of the most distinguished thinkers philosophy has known: Samuel Alexander in England, Nicolai Hartmann in Germany, and George Santayana and A. N. Whitehead in the United States. Although these men differed in many respects, they were all in the classical tradition in the sense that they were intellectually imaginative in their efforts to understand the world, and they put forward complex systems rather than confining themselves to the analysis of special problems.

Last year, in the pages of a special double issue of *Studium Generale,* the German scholarly magazine, there was a long and comprehensive attempt to evaluate the work of a contemporary American, James Feibleman. (It is perhaps characteristic of the state of philosophy today that recognition must begin in Europe.) Professor Feibleman is the chief representative in the present generation of the classical realist point of view. Although his writing has been extensive, his work has been unduly neglected, almost, in fact, to a scandalous degree. But it has been the lot of not a few American philosophers who subsequently took their place on the world scene to suffer the same fate. James had little recognition until he had acquired a reputation in Europe, and the same can be said for Santayana and Charles S. Pierce. If this broader understanding of philosophy does indeed ever reestablish itself, as it seems to be doing, Professor Feibleman might well wake up one morning to find himself America's leading philosopher.

Professor Feibleman was born in New Orleans in 1904. He was educated in the public schools there, and at the Horace Mann School in New York. His first year at the University of Virginia was interrupted by illness, and upon his recovery, he was drawn, like other isolated American intellectuals, to the Paris of the 1920s. He was not unprepared for the city of Hemingway and Joyce, since he was already publishing poetry in the little magazines of the period, and had, with the enthusiasm of youth, identified himself with the new literary movements. With the end of the Paris phase he returned to New Orleans and entered his father's business. As was the case with two or three other provincial American cities at the time, New Orleans was a small center of literary ferment, which found expression in the *Double Dealer,* a periodical with a national reputation. Professor Feibleman quickly became a member of the circle, and finally withdrew from business to devote himself entirely to writing. Eventually his interests turned to philosophy and he became a member of the department at Tulane University. Later he was made chairman and continued in that capacity until he was given the W. R. Irby Chair of Philosophy, which he still occupies.

Professor Feibleman stresses the fact that his philosophy is finite and tentative. This notion of a finite philosophy is extremely important. It contracts the field of investigation, and minimizes the risk of neglecting the importance of the particular. It also preserves the basic laws of logic, which inevitably lose significance in the realm of infinite being, where contradiction is not excluded. Furthermore, Professor Feibleman suggests that there are few, if any, notions in philosophy that demand the idea of infinity to sustain them; there seem to be none that cannot be explained in terms of the finite.

From this point of view Professor Feibleman has set about the construction of an elaborate philosophical system. Its aim is the aim of all such systems, namely, to give a full understanding of reality. There is an optimism about Professor Feibleman's approach: "Given all the theories and facts of modern knowledge," he writes, the problem is "to find the explanatory system which could best account for them." This means that science, philosophy, poetry, history, religion and the social sciences must all be brought together in a harmonious whole. Speaking specifically of this in an interview by Feibleman some twenty years ago, Einstein said: "We need philosophical systems, only they must be revised from time to time and made big enough so that inside them there is room for the sciences to turn."

This also means that the primary ideas

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of such a system must be of the widest inclusiveness. Ideas in science simply do not possess the necessary generality to serve as starting points for a comprehensive philosophical system. Inevitably, therefore, the development of such a system must turn to the philosophical domain itself for fundamental conceptions.

In a vast book called *Ontology,* Professor Feibleman gives the basis of his system as a three-fold division into essence, existence and destiny. He holds that in combination they are extensive enough to embrace the world and all that it contains. They are indeed ancient philosophical concepts, but in each case their meaning has been modified and defined to meet the requirements of Professor Feibleman's own thought. *Essences* are ideals or possibilities and are associated generally with Plato's realm of ideas or universals, a domain occupied by abstract objects only, akin to the mathematical objects. Feibleman, following a suggestion of Russell's and Wittgenstein's, thinks of the domain of essence as an extremely fine logical mesh, so fine in fact that it mirrors existence. *Existence* is the world of nature, of actual objects; it occupies the time and space in which we live and think and feel and act. It is the circle we draw on a piece of paper, which is never exactly a circle, and hence is never circularity, which is always perfect. *Destiny* is purpose, or in the modern term, "process." At bottom, though again with modifications, it is the classical doctrine of teleology. It is the movement of actual objects toward their possibilities, the movement of existence toward essence, and contains all our efforts to construct order in the world by means of the sciences, the arts and philosophy.

In less technical language Professor Feibleman is in accord with classical thought, which holds that the things that have their being in time and space are partly the product of fixed laws. Feibleman is saying: Reality consists of a two-story world. The ground floor is the material world, with its matter in motion in space and time. The upper story contains the forms that matter can exchange for those it currently possesses, and it changes its forms continually. When we say that nothing lasts forever, we mean no formed material does, although both the material and the forms seem fairly permanent.

With this theoretical basis Professor Feibleman proceeds to many fields of investigation: religion, psychiatry (he was a lecturer for many years at the Louisiana State University Medical School), aesthetics, the nature of comedy, education, the institutions of society, a study of human culture.

I suppose the best analogy would be that of a searchlight moving across a dark field. It illuminates a single section at a time, passing from one to the other, but the source of the illumination is a single point. Using this technique, Professor Feibleman has as his aim to exhibit the philosophical assumptions that underlie man's major activities and the consequences that flow from the adoption of explicit or implicit premises.

Feibleman has very many special things to say about the acquisition of knowledge, its communication, its preparation for storage in the memory, and its conversion to beliefs. Beliefs furnish the springs to action, action leads to further knowledge, and the cycle is complete. Unfortunately, actions follow as easily from false beliefs as from true ones. Politics is only too often successfully based upon the deliberate use of false beliefs. Certain knowledge outside the abstractions of logic and mathematics is difficult if not impossible to obtain. The world of practical action moves on half-truths. Half-truths are half-false of course, but nobody has noticed that they are also half-true. We act, as the ancient skeptics noticed, on the basis of probabilities—nothing more secure than that.

Feibleman's metaphysics implies his theory of knowledge, and it is a short distance from there to his ethics. Every study of ethics must stand or fall on its theory of the good. In a work entitled *Moral Strategy,* Feibleman defines the good as "what is needed." Here then is no subjective theory of ethical values. For what is needed is always something external to the person. Objects and actions have their own values

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whether anyone stands in a perspective that enables him to apprehend that good or not. His feeling of goodness if he succeeds in gaining his object is a response to its own qualities.

Two central features extend this conception. These are: "type responsibility" and "confrontation." All individuals of a given type are attracted to all other individuals of that same type in virtue of a common dependence upon type responsibility. Common membership in a type leads to similarity of behavior. Confrontation involves good behavior, and Feibleman defines it as "conduct toward another, in consideration of all others." The moral quality is the quality of completeness.

Feibleman sees morality in terms of levels of obligation: individual, social, human and cosmic. He carries the previous ideas of the good, of type responsibility and of confrontation, through each of these levels to show how they operate. As a matter of practical exigency, he thinks that it is necessary to construct an ideal morality and then to examine what the actual conditions of the prevailing concrete morality are before a moral strategy can be designed for getting from the concrete morality to the kind of behavior that conforms to the chosen ideal.

Feibleman's theory of knowledge leads directly into his aesthetics, which is not so different from his ethics in its fundamentals; it is as a matter of fact the other side of the coin. Most errors made in the pursuit of knowledge are unintentional, but not all. Some are deliberate products of the imagination, which works over the images presented to it by perception and retained in the memory, and reassembles them in significant and emotionally moving ways. There is no such animal as a unicorn but there is also nothing absolutely original about it. Some artist gave a horse the horn from a rhinoceros, that's all. There never was a little girl who drank a bottle of ink and so became small enough to go through a keyhole, but little girls, bottles of ink and keyholes are familiar enough. A work of literary art consists in a particular set of false propositions, Feibleman says.

Man does not give the world its values; he finds them there. He himself is a product of that world and native to it; he manages to survive in it by adapting to it. One form of his adaptation consists in the production of works of art. Feibleman defines art as "the deliberate apprehension of beauty in a material object," and he defines beauty as "the quality which emerges from the perfect relations of parts in the whole." Plato had talked about the harmony of a work of art, and Aquinas had referred to its radiance. Works of art are made in order to produce the radiance of harmony. Feibleman describes the process by means of which the artist alters the material in his environment to gain such an effect, whether it be sentences in a language, bronze or sounds. But he employs quite a different kind of psychology to describe the process of their appreciation by others.

There is such a thing as the aesthetic emotion, Feibleman believes. It is aroused by images. In works of art such images exhibit the connections between widely different things and so convey to the feelings of the appreciator the unity of the world. This act of recognition is the pleasure provided by the work of art. It deepens and enriches human life, and for this reason is treasured.

More than any other single subject Feibleman has studied the sciences and their methods. He has published his conclusions in articles in *Nature, Perspectives in Biology and Medicine,* and the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science,* and in a book called *Scientific Method.* His view of the implications of science, to which he has given a great deal of attention, is highly sophisticated. Philosophically he holds that science is based on the belief that the external world consists of natural phenomena that contain both uniformities (laws) and nonuniformities (chance, chaos, disorder), and that natural phenomena are approachable from different levels of analysis.

Ever since Aristotle, men have thought that the world is structured in levels. Its unity comes from the way these are fitted together, a continuum marked by inanimate matter, plants, animals and finally men. What Lovejoy later called "the great

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chain of being" runs, Aristotle supposed, from the smallest species to the largest genus, from the smallest population of classifiable objects to the largest class having any members. Professor Feibleman has seen that this classification is continued in the hierarchy of the sciences, upward from the physical through the chemical and the biological to the social or cultural. It is, he thinks, the task of the experimental sciences to determine these classes and what belongs in them. We no longer guess at what constitutes classes and their members; we investigate them in the laboratory of the experimental scientist.

Many recent studies in the philosophy of science have been devoted to scientific explanation. But interpretations of the method undertaken to discover its meaning are premature unless that method itself has been fully and impartially described. This, Feibleman charges, has not been done. As a consequence there have been many errors in the attempts to apply the method of the physical sciences to the social sciences. Inductive studies are treated in much the same way, and too little attention has been devoted to the hypotheses with which the method begins.

Feibleman had endeavored to examine the logical structure of the method of the physical sciences, which he describes as a stage-process. It begins, he says, with the observations that lead to inductions, it continues with the formulation and adoption of hypotheses, and it ends in the two steps by which the hypotheses are tested: first for correspondence with the facts, in experiments with the aid of elaborately constructed instruments; and second for consistency, by means of mathematical calculations, all ending with the prediction and control of phenomena.

Feibleman has distinguished carefully between the scientists and their equipment, which includes not only their laboratory instruments but also the knowledge they had previously gained, the method they practice, and the field they practice it on. The world of the very small, atoms, molecules and cells, was merely discovered by scientists, not owned by them, and the same is true of the vast universe which is explored by the astronomers. Both worlds are only extensions of our own, not readily available to our unaided senses, yet we live in them.

The ancient Greeks understood and practiced the scientific method of experiment, but science made no appreciable progress until the seventeenth century, chiefly, Feibleman believes, because the Greeks had not discovered that scientific findings could be cumulative. Each Greek scientist started from the beginning, whereas after the seventeenth century scientists formed the practice of starting where earlier investigators had left off. The result has been the astonishingly steep and steady upward climb of scientific success.

The cultivation of the sciences gives only a small glimmer of what man is capable of achieving. Civilization itself is an index to the unfolding of his capacities. One of Feibleman's most important contributions is contained in what he has to say on the nature of man himself. The ultimate aim of all human efforts, Feibleman believes, is the "superidentification" of the individual with the whole of the material universe or its cause. This is his first and greatest need and the end of all of his efforts. In order to work toward such a grandiose end, however, he must first survive and, if possible, flourish. There are compensatory rewards along the way, which accompany the satisfaction of his lesser needs.

All of his needs are organ-specific, that is to say, particular organs must be supplied with materials that he finds for them in the external world. There is an *importunate* group of needs that must be served first, and then an *important* group for the sake of which the first group exists. In the first group we find the stomach needing food, the tissues water, the gonads a mate. There is a need of the whole body for shelter, clothing and sleep.

This much is well known, but what is not so well known is that the *important* group of needs has its appropriate organs also: activity for the muscles, knowledge for the brain, security for the skin. The needs of the muscles are well known to

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those who see what happens to them when they are inactive, as for instance a broken arm in a cast. The need of the brain for knowledge is a fact that has been established in recent years. If a developing brain is not furnished with a certain amount of information, it never becomes fully mature. The skin is not ordinarily thought of as an important organ although by weight it is the largest. It serves as the frontier of the body and its ultimate guarantee of security, and so has come to play a large role in religious ritual. Since it cannot come into intimate contact with the object it needs, namely the universe or its cause, it does so by means of symbols. Hence the sacraments that one finds to be so common, the "contagious magic" of so many primitive religions, and the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is Feibleman's opinion that the recent discoveries in the field of prehistory must change very sharply our view of human nature. The ancestry of man stretches back for hundreds of thousands of years into the past, but man in his present constitution is only some forty thousand years old. For the whole of that prehistoric time he was a nomad and food-gatherer, a hunter and probably a cannibal. He cherished the members of the small in-group and fought the members of the small out-group, and in this way developed an ambivalent nature. This is where the needs of the muscles come in. If we accept Feibleman's broad definition of "aggression" as the forcible alteration of material objects in the immediate environment, then we find two kinds of aggression: constructive and destructive. Men love to construct things and also to destroy them; to build artifacts—everything in fact from violins to skyscrapers, from mathematical systems to works of art—but also to smash them by waging savage wars.

Civilization was delayed for hundreds of thousands of years because the nomad could not carry very much. He saw no reason to make what he could not keep. Only in the last ten thousand years, after the discovery of animal husbandry and of agriculture, were settled communities developed. Men for the first time were in a position to accumulate artifacts and to pass them on to their children. Progress in the satisfaction of human needs came rapidly after the discovery that tools could do the job much more efficiently than unaided hands. Cities made possible great specialization and an intense interchange of products. Civilization was in effect externalization, a result of man learning to do outside his body and more effectively by means of artifacts what formerly he had done only on the inside. Thus libraries proved more efficient than memories, and airplanes quicker than legs.

But there has been at the same time no progress in motivation. Here, Feibleman points out, there is an ambivalence. Men still seek to help and hurt their fellows, hence the rapid development of medicine—and of warfare. And that is where the human dilemma leaves us. We must learn how to encourage *constructive* aggression while at the same time discouraging *destructive* aggression, and so far we have made no advance in the latter direction. Unless we do so there can be little hope for human survival.

Closely related to these thoughts are Feibleman's views of religion, which is much more of an explanatory affair and much less of a final and absolute one than it is usually thought to be. God for him is a question, not a set of answers, in practice only another way of looking at the world as a whole. Like Bruno and Spinoza, Feibleman sees God and the world together. The closest we can come to knowing God, he thinks, is to see how God's world works. Science, in this view, becomes a religious undertaking. We need to understand the world before we can know how we want to change it, and in this way science stands quite apart from the uses to which it is put by the applied scientists.

Men do not feel secure or comfortable unless they are able to conduct their lives in terms of some absolute belief that seems to most of them to be a necessity, Feibleman argues. Now, unfortunately, absolute beliefs are always derived from some characteristic of group differences in human cultures. Historically the most familiar were religious beliefs, and when these went they

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were replaced by nationalistic beliefs or by beliefs based on economic class differences. Yet the secularization of humanity has not resulted, as so many have thought that it would, in drawing diverse peoples together, but rather in substituting a social for a supernatural ground for their differences. We do not arm against Russia because we wish to convert official atheists. Thus the problem of the future of mankind means finding a basis for absolute belief in the similarities of peoples rather than in their differences, or it means getting free—somehow—of the need for absolute belief.

In many ways the most original of Feibleman's work is his theory of human culture. He believes that social organizations, although put together by human individuals, lead lives of their own and do not always have the effects that were intended for them. This is true certainly of institutions, such as educational systems, churches, applied sciences and governments. And if it is true of institutions, then how much more true must it be of cultures, which consist not only of individuals and social groups but also of institutions organized in a series of importance.

Cultures are wholes, which no individual or group controls. Since they did not come about as the result of deliberate efforts, the only way to account for their organization is to look for some evidence of consistency. Feibleman professes to find it in a concrete metaphysics, which is manifested in the consistency-rules underlying every culture and expressed in a number of ways, some of which rise to the surface where they can be observed. They rise to the surface in the choice of institutions, usually no more than one or two, that assume leadership in the culture. They rise to the surface in the customs that are practiced and in those traditions that are remembered and retained. They rise to the surface in the style that the arts have in common, and of course in many other ways too numerous to mention. Cultures are best understood, then, as concrete philosophies.

A good example of this can be found here at home. The reason philosophy never made its way across the Atlantic is that the United States is the most positivistic of countries, Feibleman believes. Americans have assumed that the applied sciences and technology are all that are necessary for a country to operate at full efficiency, and with full efficiency all other considerations are excluded. Here then is an example of an implicit dominant philosophy operating to the exclusion of all other philosophies.

Under positivism, only studies that can claim a material reference are admissible. Physics has matter, space and time, which can be examined for laws. Biology has living organisms, the social sciences have societies. But philosophy has nothing. Or at least so the going opinion has it. But Feibleman insists that metaphysics, too, has such a reference, and that it is human culture—the whole of it. And this is true because cultures are the fleshed out bones of concrete philosophies.

As Spengler, Toynbee and others have discovered, cultures have life cycles. They come into existence, grow, flourish, decline and die. Why? Many answers have been given to this question and many a reputation has been made by suggesting one. Feibleman has his own. To describe it I must fall back on the model of a simple logical system.

Like Euclid's proof of a theorem or like the Aristotelian syllogism, cultures begin by accepting certain first principles; in cultures these are represented by a critical or crucial set of events. After this the development of the culture consists in working out deductively in practice the possible consequences of incorporating such first principles as the springs of action. They are incorporated in the beliefs of the individuals and in the ranking of social institutions, for instance, as well as in many other places. The principle of German supremacy was tested after the Archduke Ferdinand was shot in Sarajevo in 1914, and the principle of Marxism was put into effect in Russia after the Germans sent Lenin into that country in 1919 in a sealed train.

The culture reaches its height when the working out of the consequences is at its fullest, and begins to decline when there is

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a scarcity of untried consequences. The culture in this way begins to lose its momentum; it fails when there are no more possible consequences, and so no more available energy. At this point any other culture that is at the stage where the first culture was at its beginning can overthrow it and replace it.

One reflection of the strength of a culture lies in its attitude toward comedy. Feibleman has explored this in a book entitled *In Praise of Comedy,* which is a study of the history of comedy, especially of theater comedy, and an essay on its essential meaning. Comedy for Feibleman consists in the indirect affirmation of the proper order of things by means of the criticism of the disorder in which those things ordinarily occur. Laughter is a kind of emotional recognition of incongruity. Sean O'Casey, the dramatist, who had many good things to say about this book, thought it "a sufficient account of what comedy has been, what it is today, and what it may be like tomorrow."

I have tried to discuss briefly the principal topics Feibleman has included in his system in one or more books, but I have not referred to them all. For instance, I have not dealt with his theory of abnormal psychology or his theory of comedy and tragedy. I have not tried to summarize his ideas in the philosophy of law or the philosophy of education.

What will Feibleman's position be in the history of philosophy? It is perhaps too early to say. He is still alive, still writing, and we are too close to his work in time to be able to gain the proper perspective on it. No one can tell who has won a race until it is over. One thing must be admitted: it is the most comprehensive speculative effort in philosophy of our generation. That it all fits together in a single scheme is a tribute to its power and consistency as well as to its inclusiveness. No one in recent decades has undertaken such a major effort in the field of thought, and for that alone Feibleman deserves our consideration.

Sleepless at Crown Point

RICHARD WILBUR

All night, this headland
Lunges into the rumpling
Capework of the wind.

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MUSIC

Gustav Mahler: Fad, or Fullness of Time?

HARVEY GROSS

> . . . as a messenger from beyond, this artist came into his empty, insipid age, exalted in his intentions, fabulous in the strength and manly warmth of his pathos. . . .
>
> Ernst Bloch, *Spirit of Utopia*

Thirty years ago Thomas Mann wrote Mahler's widow that "the peculiar and fortuitous passion of Americans for Sibelius" had delayed the appreciation of Mahler's music in this country. The time was shortly after the Russo-Finnish War, and I well remember that the music of Sibelius—especially *Finlandia* and the Second Symphony—was everywhere heard along with much talk about the rugged Finnish landscape and the heroic Finnish people. Sibelius no longer enjoys an inflated reputation, and Mahler has become an established, indeed, a genuinely popular composer. The destiny he often prophesied for himself, "My time will yet come," has been extravagantly fulfilled. He is now the last in that great line of Viennese symphonists—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and Bruckner—who hold a regular place on concert programs and are affectionately regarded by contemporary audiences. His Viennese disciples and inheritors of the nineteenth-century musical tradition, Schönberg, Berg and Webern, although performed by devoted interpreters, essentially remain mysteries to most music lovers. But Mahler is richly appreciated and enjoyed; he is *in*, he is *heavy*.

Mahler is something more (perhaps I should say *something else*) than a favorite composer, as Beethoven was with my contemporaries and myself when we were first learning to understand serious music. Among the signs of the times are bumper stickers that read "Mahler Grooves," and a recording, jazzily called *Mahler's Head*. On the jacket of the recording, an artist has depicted the austere Gustav in counter-culture getup, complete with love beads. There is Visconti's kitschy film, *Death in Venice*, in which Gustav von Aschenbach, accompanied by the lush string and harp music of the "Adagietto" from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, succumbs to decadence and homoerotic passion. (That Thomas Mann had Mahler in mind when he created the character of Aschenbach is hardly an excuse for what Visconti does both to Mann's masterpiece and to the interspersed details from Mahler's life. Aschenbach is shown as a demented composer, noisily facing the late nineteenth-century problems of art and life, nature and spirit, dissolution and affirmation, et cetera *ad nauseam*.)

What these signs point to is that Mahler, like another expression of the post-romantic spirit, Hermann Hesse, has become a cult, if not exactly a culture hero. Consequently, Mahler's work tends either to be overvalued or valued for other than strictly musical reasons. I say this without condescension, but with the realization that Mahler's work, rich as it is with extra-musical associations, invites the response and the interpretation of the relatively unsophisticated. It is hard

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to fault those whose reactions to Mahler seem either literary or naïve. Mahler wrote out elaborate programs for his symphonies—which he later repudiated and suppressed. Five of the ten completed symphonies (if we count *Das Lied von der Erde* as the actual ninth symphony) include settings of poetic texts. The Eighth is an expanded two-part cantata; *Das Lied* is a song cycle cast in symphonic form. His music is heavily involved with word and symbol; even in the purely instrumental works, we are plunged into a world of vividly depicted states of feeling. It is not surprising, then, that many listeners recognize in Mahler's music the outlines of his autobiography, the chapters of a great confession.

The Mahler symphony reaches beyond music toward a struggle with existential and religious problems. If Schubert gives us a range and depth of feeling drawn from nakedly human experience, Mahler, intensifying Schubert's romantic procedures, gives us an enlarged symphonic world in which we may hear (perhaps darkly) theodicies, metaphysical landscapes, man's estrangement from self and God. It is certainly Mahler's religious "engagement"—naïve as it must seem to the theologically sophisticated and blasphemous to the orthodox—that partially accounts for his current popularity. The fourth and fifth movements of the Second Symphony are an amalgam of folk song, Klopstock's pietistic *Resurrection Ode,* and Mahler's own words. The result is an ecumenicism not unlike that blend of evangelism and pop art found in *Jesus Christ Superstar.*

A more extreme example of Mahler's religious eclecticism is the Eighth Symphony, compounded out of a highly aestheticized Roman Catholicism and a tortured yearning toward redemptive belief. In this work Mahler makes a strenuous effort to harmonize the final scene of Goethe's *Faust* with the medieval hymn, *Veni creator spiritus.* The result is not a creation that convinces us of the necessary relationship of its parts. Goethe's vision of heaven and redemption is skeptical and humane; the hymn is Catholic, primitive, and informed with a theological bias foreign to Goethe's thinking. Discrepancies between the two parts are more or less mediated by an operatic style which, at least to my mind, suits neither Goethe's complex vision nor the directness of the hymn. But Mahler's method strikes us as familiar; it is the technique of collage and symbol that orders much modern literature. The violent juxtapositions of the archaic and contemporary, the mythical and the ordinary, which we note in the work of Eliot, Joyce and Mann, are prefigured in Mahler's music.

We approach some often-noted features of Mahler's style: his allusions to previous music and his many modes of irony and parody. In the opening movement of the First Symphony, the long pedal on the dominant and the motifs in descending fourths are recollections of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth. The Second, Third and Fifth symphonies all begin with "quotations." The opening of the Second, with its powerful string tremolo on G and its running figures in the bass, derives from Schubert's *Erlkönig.* The Third begins with eight horns in unison blaring out a scarcely disguised version of the string tune from the finale of Brahms's First. The opening of the Fifth, with its tripleted "fate" motif, is almost a note-for-note reproduction of Mendelssohn's "Funeral March" from *Songs Without Words.* We would also single out for particular mention the ghostly and insistent references to the first movement of Schubert's *Unfinished* in the finale of the Sixth. First heard on the bass tuba, this fragment of Schubert's theme gradually assumes a most poignant significance: an anguished memory of a lost world. The effect is like the one Eliot evokes in *The Waste Land* with his thematic use of Shakespeare's, "Those are pearls that were his eyes."

In his *Doctor Faustus* (whose hero, Adrian Leverkühn, has some distinctly Mahler-like qualities) Thomas Mann notes that the stylistic features of nineteenth-century music have become clichés "through a historical process which no one reverses." Mahler's modernity lay in his

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recognition that he could not approach certain generic forms, even certain melodic structures except in the spirit of parody. Thus some of his most original and effective movements are deliberate distortions of funeral processions, of the Austrian *Ländler,* and again and again in his work, of military marches. Among his most striking creations are the burlesque funeral march of the First, the grotesque *Ländler* of the Ninth, and the wild march that forms the opening "Allegro energico" of the Sixth. But Mahler's ironic spirit does not only reshape the content of traditional musical structures; it crops up in every detail of his work. We may hear a violin apparently playing a series of wrong notes in mockery of a country fiddler, or the inappropriate trombone, in its low register, gracelessly negotiating the clichéd "Wagner turn."

Mahler's problem, in that uncertain period between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was double. He wished to continue the great tradition of the Beethoven symphony with its heroic affirmations, its closely integrated form, and its expansively popular character. Born too late, however, not to have been affected by the Wagnerian aesthetic and the overwhelming influence of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* Mahler could not approach composition as a musician with merely abstract musical problems to solve. The form in which he chose to cast his major ideas, the symphony, had been exhausted before he even wrote his First Symphony. He moved toward the song, toward program music, and he is a product of that romantic tendency, which begins with Schumann, to bring into close relationship the literary and musical arts. Romantic criticism and theory revalued the classic doctrine that poems should be like pictures; poems should have the affective power of music. Conversely, music moved closer to poetry, and with Wagner, to the theater. Mahler, we must remember, was the greatest conductor of opera in his age. It may detract from Mahler's credit to characterize the rhetorical effects in his work as theatrical, but doubtless these effects have enhanced Mahler's popularity with that group of listeners whose response to music increases with the decibel level.

The literary and the rhetorical are the questionable features of Mahler's art. He was himself a bad poet; the sentimental words he wrote for his *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* are embarrassing to read. The programs he wrote for his first three symphonies detail a wildly romantic conceptual framework for the musical fabric. He later regretted the programs and they were not printed in the published scores. These programs are not, however, comparable to the narrative scaffolding beneath Strauss's tone poems. Mahler thinks in moods, in particular images and symbols; words are transformed into musical feelings. Unlike Strauss he makes no attempt to depict in music specific events or to imitate precisely the sounds of human life. It is, in this respect, illuminating to compare two pointedly autobiographical works, Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* and Mahler's Sixth Symphony. *Ein Heldenleben* represents the composer fighting the critics, making music, making love, and finally basking in the warm glow of well-deserved success. The work allows us to experience how satisfying life was to Richard Strauss. Mahler's Sixth does not represent anything; it expresses the agony of Mahler's inner life with bleak honesty. The turmoil of the first movement, the irony of the second, the brief repose of the third, and the final movement which tells of a world without transcendence: here are no pictures of bourgeois complacency but a musical analogue to Mahler's deepest experiences.

Many have taken offense at Mahler's obvious rhetoric: his Titanism and apocalypticism. That sensitive and discerning soul, Paul Rosenfeld, complained (1923): "And since he could not feel, he took to making music by brute force; drove his orchestra to climaxes with sadistic vehemence, as though he would ravish an aesthetic emotion from the hearers." Certainly we could wish that Mahler had reduced the sheer volume of sound, that he had judiciously cut and trimmed his work. The length of all the symphonies—with the exception of the Fourth—is rarely

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justified by the variety or the quality of the musical materials. Yeats asked, "What is rhetoric but the will trying to do the work of the imagination?" The unquenched intensity of Mahler's will can carry him through the largest structures. When will and imagination combine—as in the brilliant scherzo of the Sixth, or in the "Rondo-Burleske" of the Ninth—the result is powerful and original. But in long sections of the Second, Third and Fifth symphonies, inspiration droops and predictable orchestral effects, insistent repetitions, and climax piled upon climax ultimately weary the listener.

We might ask, then, what is the significance of the current interest in Mahler? We are living through a period in which the historical process seems crazily accelerated, and in which many cultural products enjoy a brief appearance and then are quickly disposed of. Our publicists of culture already speak of "the sixties" as a defined historical era, of "the fifties" and "the forties" as part of the remote past. Will it seem, in ten years, that Mahler's fullness of time was those years between the early sixties and seventies; that his popularity was due not to inherent values in his music, but that his music, with its apocalypticism, its richness of sentiment, and its eclectic plenitude, evoked a sympathetic but only temporary response from the *Zeitgeist*? Will it seem that Mahler's music filled a need to return to that post-romantic world of eloquent affirmation and even more eloquent despair; that after the present mood of nostalgia passes, Mahler will be forgotten?

I venture that Mahler's current popularity will subside, and that some of his work will disappear from the repertoire. But a canon of permanent value will emerge. My nomination of works for such a canon is, of course, personal and makes no claim to ultimate validity. Of the symphonies I would choose the Fourth, Sixth and Ninth. The Fourth (in the words of T. W. Adorno), "a masterpiece of the as-if from the first to the last note," shows Mahler at his archaizing best, with his will relaxed and his humor unforced. The Sixth, although marred by characteristic excesses, makes no pretense to religious affirmation, to feelings Mahler had to distort or fake. It is often harsh, disagreeable music, but it blazes with unflagging conviction. The Ninth, Mahler's last completed work, is an "unmediated vision"; in this music we are hardly conscious of technical means or formal problems. We are in direct possession of the experiences out of which the music issued.

Of the works for voice and orchestra, I would choose *Die Kindertotenlieder* and *Das Lied von der Erde*. The chamber-music style of *Die Kindertotenlieder* is a complete triumph; the single notes on the glockenspiel at the end of the first song are among the most moving of Mahler's instrumental effects—infinitely more telling than the colossal sonorities of the Eighth. Alone, *Das Lied* places Mahler among the masters of modern music. Written in 1908, it sums up that nineteenth century out of which Mahler emerged: a century heavy with romantic pessimism and exaggerated sentiment. The last movement, *Der Abschied*, with its *ewig . . . ewig* and its final unresolved dissonance, "breathes the air of other planets." *Das Lied* "breaks through" to that first moment of the modern, that half-decade before World War I that saw Schönberg's revision of tonality and Stravinsky's instrumental and rhythmic radicalism.

Because Mahler's music is uneven, running the gamut from the banal to the great, it is easy either to dismiss it or to make impossible claims for it. Mahler's early critics and biographers, who came under the influence of his powerful personality, could see him only as saint and superman. Paul Bekker, in his detailed analyses of Mahler's symphonies, writes as if Mahler never showed a lapse in taste, never experienced a failure in inspiration. At the opposite pole stand the judgments of Paul Rosenfeld and Paul Henry Láng. They regard Mahler as a man with a flawed lyrical talent who made a monumental assault on symphonic form. Paul Rosenfeld remarks, "So he took his talent, and began forcing it to flesh arbitrarily conceived

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schemes. Perceiving the philosophical weight of Beethoven and Wagner, he began searching for an aprioristic metaphysical orientation. It was a literary composer, in the bad sense, that he became."

More illuminating are the critical writings of T. W. Adorno (*Mahler: Eine musikalische Physiognomik,* 1960). Adorno, who was a philosopher and sociologist, as well as a musical theorist, places Mahler between a lost world of utopian promise and our present age of tragic awareness. Mahler's innovations in symphonic structure issue out of those historical conditions "which no one reverses"; his handling of tonality, rhythm and instrumentation look ahead to that "breakthrough" of matter and form that marks not only the art works of our era but also its social and cultural reality. That Mahler's "musical speech is thoroughly fragmented," that his work was considered problematic makes it authentic and valuable. It speaks to us "without mediation"; its musical conventions, issuing from the great Viennese tradition, communicate a direct vision of the individual spirit trapped in his own estrangement, and of a society suffering the traumas of cultural decay and political confusion.

We can view Mahler's music as symptomatic of those historical changes that characterize our century. His steadily rising reputation during this last decade confirms his importance as prophet and seer. The reasons for his visibility may lie partly in temporary aberrations of cultural preference. Like Hesse, Mahler speaks to the romantic young; his music expresses the disillusionments of growing up, and the agonized delight in probing the wounded self. But these compelling features could not secure Mahler permanent status as an important, let alone a great, composer. Mahler's music has a fierce intrinsic validity. Even when he forces a climax or descends to bathos, we are impressed by the ethical energy striving toward a vision of spiritual wholeness. He never achieves that visionary goal—at least not in the concluding choruses of the Eighth Symphony. Like Faust, "he errs as long as he will strive." But in his best work, in the naïve geniality of the Fourth, or in the valedictory despair of *Das Lied* and the Ninth, we know we are hearing music of enduring value.

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INTERVIEW

The Art of John A. Williams

JOHN O'BRIEN

John A. Williams was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1925 and spent his youth in Syracuse, New York. Although he did not publish his first novel until he was thirty-five, his last twelve years have been prolific: he has written five more novels, a biography of Richard Wright, a journal of his travels through America in 1963, and a controversial book on Martin Luther King, and has edited several other books.

Williams's critical reception, although wide, has been an imbalanced one. His reviewers point to his concern with racial, social and political themes in his work while they overlook the philosophical and psychological structures that give meaning to those themes. For instance, the situation of blacks in America supplied Williams with the perfect metaphor for studying the nature and influence of history and for testing whether man, either as an individual or as a race, can transcend the nightmarish role that history has fashioned for him. But his critics have not granted him this kind of concern; nor have they looked at his attempts to explain the unique psychological insights he has gained in studying the effects of racism; nor have they investigated the existential framework in which he writes. As Williams points out, these matters are discussed only in relation to white writers.

The interview was conducted on a bright, chilly day in early November, 1971. We talked without interruption for almost two hours. As his remarks in the interview make clear, Williams approaches critics with caution. He speaks in a low, subdued voice and lets his words carry the weight of his meaning. I began the interview by asking him about his article "The Literary Ghetto," in which he attacked critics and publishers for their continued, although more subtle, racist treatment of black writers.

JOHN O'BRIEN: You said in an article that appeared in the *Saturday Review* that you wished for once that you could read a review of a novel by a black writer in which it wasn't compared only to novels by other black writers. Does such treatment of black writers have its roots in racism?

JOHN A. WILLIAMS: I think it's racism and I think it's something that black writers have dealt with with accommodating behavior for several years, and we still do. The fact is that when you can point out the elements of racism in the business as I did in that article, it doesn't make a goddamn bit of difference. They still do it. On the soft cover of *The Man Who Cried I Am* it says, "The best novel about blacks since Ralph Ellison." That is defining the territory where black writers are allowed to roam. But you know, I'm a contemporary of Styron, Mailer and Bruce J. Friedman. Chester Himes and Richard Wright were contemporaries of Hemingway, toward his later years. And Ellison. But we never somehow get into the area where we're compared with white contemporaries. It's always with black contemporaries. What else can you say, but that it is racism?

✪ Liveright will publish JOHN O'BRIEN's *The Art of Black Writers*, a collection of interviews with contemporary black writers, this year. Mr. O'Brien teaches in the Department of English at Northern Illinois University.

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O'BRIEN: The point of the article then was that comparisons should be made along literary rather than racial lines?

WILLIAMS: Well, yes, sure . . . I'd like for somebody to begin stacking up *Native Son* with some of Frank Norris's stuff and I'd like to see Chester Himes stacked up to some of these detective-story writers and some of the fiction writers who are still writing fiction from his generation. I'd like to see how I'd stack up against Styron and others who are my contemporaries. Now this doesn't mean that I'm seeking to divest myself of my identity. But I think that one of the reasons why these comparisons are not made in many cases is that black writers would come out better. It's sort of like with Jack Johnson, the heavyweight champion. You can't have those black guys winning at everything, or even looking as though they could possibly win. That's bad business. Things begin to happen to the economic structure of the literary world.

O'BRIEN: Do you think that black writers are doing things to the form of the American novel that simply are not understood by readers and critics?

WILLIAMS: In terms of form itself, the novel is changing. I think that black writers are initiating, if not forcing, a kind of change from the "straight ahead" American novel, vis-à-vis Hemingway and Fitzgerald. There's an inclination to do to the novel what Charlie Parker did to jazz. I don't know whether you remember this period in jazz music that is called "bop" where the method was to take . . . well, you could take any tune that was standard, say "Stardust," for example. They would go through it once and then would come through again with all their improvisations, so that it was only recognizable in part. You knew where the players were at certain points in the music, and only by virtue of touching on those old standard parts in the second passage through did you realize that it was really "Stardust." That's the way it works. And I think that's what's happening to the novel. You see it in William Melvin Kelley's last book, *Dunford's Travels Everywheres,* which is not only an exercise in form but also an exercise in language. Ishmael Reed's books. George Lamming has a book which just came out called *Natives of My Person,* which is an allegory about the seventeenth-century English slave trade. I read novels like these and it's incredible. You're reading English but it comes through in such a way that it doesn't seem like English; it comes through like Spanish, French . . . anything except what you're familiar with.

O'BRIEN: Is the difference between what these writers are doing and what white writers are doing mainly a literary one, or is there something else too?

WILLIAMS: I think that there is a difference in approach to "consciousness" between black and white writers. I don't think white writers have ever had to consciously or subconsciously concern themselves about real problems of life and survival. You can take Salinger's Holden Caulfield. The mentality that issues forth from books like that is that the evil is not within us. It's an outside thing, which perhaps has to be combated. But it's going to be combated on white horses by white knights in white suits of armor. There's no question about it. There's no concern expressed for the world that's not white. The difference with black writers is that their concern has been made extremely conscious, not only by their position in the literary world, by the editors and critics, but also by virtue of their awareness of what the situation is.

O'BRIEN: Then the black writer has been forced to be more concerned with social and political issues just because of his position in society?

WILLIAMS: I think "forced" is the right word. There are many, many black writers today, and in the Harlem Renaissance and even prior to that, who would have been happy to have had acceptance on the terms of being a writer. I think it's the critics who have made the decision for us, by boxing us into an area where our books have been labeled "protest." A very narrow pigeonhole. And I think it sort of deprived us of the ability to mirror through our work all of humanity. So "forced" is a good word—

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forced in terms of our area being well defined, well drawn for us.

O'BRIEN: Do you think of yourself as belonging to a realistic tradition in fiction? Have you purposely avoided experimentation?

WILLIAMS: I suppose I am a realistic writer. I've been called a melodramatic writer, but I think that's only because I think the end of a novel should be at the ending of the book. Not on page sixty-two or page twenty-five. In terms of experimenting, I think that I've done some very radical things with form in *The Man Who Cried I Am* and in *Captain Blackman,* which had to be an experimental novel in order to hold the theme of the novel. What I try to do with novels is to deal in forms that are not standard, to improvise as jazz musicians do with their music so that a standard theme comes out looking brand new. This is all I try to do with a novel and, like those musicians, I am trying to do things with form that are not always immediately perceptible to most people.

O'BRIEN: Do you recall your first attempts at serious writing? How old were you? What kind of things were you writing?

WILLIAMS: I started writing when I was overseas in the Navy during the war, and it wasn't very good. It was mostly what one would call "free verse" poetry. I always had a feeling that I was capable of being a writer. I never felt that I was deluding myself by trying to be a writer. The problem with writing for me personally lay outside writing itself. It was considered an illness to be involved in the arts, since in the black community there were no artists to speak of. One did not earn his keep by writing poetry or novels. That was out there in never-never-never land. What I really wanted to do was get a good job, work from nine-to-five, or ten-to-four, and live in that fashion. But it became clear to me after several years that even so simple a thing as that was subject to stresses because of discrimination. It was only then that I turned to writing full time. Pretty much for the same reason James Baldwin did, to remain sane, to feel that one was really in touch with oneself, that you were not a ghost, but a functioning person capable of thinking and perceiving and feeling.

O'BRIEN: Have you gone through periods where you felt that you had said everything there was to say, or periods where you felt that your writing was not accomplishing what you wanted it to?

WILLIAMS: I don't go through periods now when I think that I won't be able to write again because of some mental block. But I do feel occasionally that I've said just about all I wanted to say. But after a few days that passes. I've also had the feeling that writing has not moved things as much as I wanted things to be moved and perhaps there might be something else I could do that would get things done. To this extent I've considered quitting writing simply because it hasn't, for myself, produced the things I want to see produced, the things I feel must be produced within my lifetime. But you get past that feeling with the passage of time.

O'BRIEN: Have you observed any pattern in how ideas for novels come to you? Must you experience most of the things you write about?

WILLIAMS: No, I haven't observed any pattern. I've had some ideas for novels for several years without putting down a line and every time I think of these ideas I add something more. I don't believe in outlines, at least they've never worked for me. When I finally sit down to write, I'm off and running because I've had the material stored up for so long. I would prefer to experience certain things myself, but I know that's not absolutely necessary. I can project on the basis of my own experiences, the experiences of others, and the testimony of still other people.

O'BRIEN: Is any one part of a novel more difficult to write than another? Do you hit any lags, perhaps after you get the basic action down? Is there a kind of crisis point which, if you get past, you know that everything else will fall into place?

WILLIAMS: For me the first fifty pages of a novel is the hardest. This may be a psychological thing. After I hit fifty pages I know that I've got a novel. It's not that

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the conception of the novel is difficult for me. But by the end of the first fifty pages I've smoothed out the form and I've got the structure licked. Then I'm off from that point.

O'BRIEN: Could you describe your work habits? Where do you write? How much each day?

WILLIAMS: I work every day. The time can vary from three to five hours, with many, many breaks in between. If it's going well I'll work at night as well, up to maybe nine o'clock or so. I no longer feel that I have to have a certain kind of atmosphere. In fact I never felt that way. I've always prided myself on being able to write anywhere. And I guess I still can. I have no ritual to go through in order to prepare myself for writing. I sit down and I write, although I have had periods when I have the urge to sharpen about two dozen pencils or polish shoes. It's not a ritual so much as it is giving myself time to think without being consciously aware of thinking of what I am going to deal with that morning, where I have to go back over the work I had done the day before, what it is I am going to repair or change or heighten.

O'BRIEN: Can you recall the circumstances in which you began working on *The Angry Ones?* Did you have any difficulty in finding a publisher for your first novel?

WILLIAMS: It was in some ways a very autobiographical novel. I felt very intensely about that book and about things that were happening to me at the time. I once rewrote the whole damn book in a day and a half at one sitting because there seemed to be the possibility of its being published by New American Library. The preliminary reports had been good, but after that day and a half of rewriting that book, it was turned down. It had been turned down by a number of publishers. What made me sit down and write the book in the first place was that I didn't have anything else to do. It was a question of holding on to my sanity, a question of writing down some of the things that had happened to me. Seeing those situations in print made me rather determined never to forget them. That gave me a new grip on life, feeling that there was a lot out there that I had to do.

O'BRIEN: Are you conscious of having been influenced by other writers?

WILLIAMS: Nobody has really influenced me. This is because I read without discrimination when I was a great deal younger. In terms of form, my single influence has been Malcolm Lowry in *Under the Volcano.* I tried to emulate him in *Sissie* and improve on what he did with the telescoping of time. But I think I did it much better in *The Man Who Cried I Am.*

O'BRIEN: What nonliterary influences have there been on your work?

WILLIAMS: I don't really know. I've read an awful lot of history. A great deal of it preancient history. I sometimes get very depressed because I know that all of this business is quite temporary. We become too self-important about our society, our crafts and skills, our families, and so on. I believe, with some other people, that human life on this planet goes in cycles. We're here for maybe ten, twenty, thirty thousand years. And then something happens, a cataclysm, and the poles start sliding around, and it's all gone. Then you start evolving again. I suppose I'm one of the rare guys you'll talk to who believes this. Nonetheless, I'm here, and I'm sort of constrained to act in patterns that are normal for the time I live in. And I suppose that happens so that you'll have some assurance of life existing even after a cataclysm. I don't know what you would call all this. I'm pessimistic about the progress that humans are going to make with each other within the time span that we have, how many hundreds or thousands of years that may be.

O'BRIEN: Do you think that music has influenced you?

WILLIAMS: I've always liked jazz and some classical music. If I had been from a well-to-do family when I was a child, I would have been a trumpeter. But when the time came to move on to a trumpet, we simply could not afford it. I haven't

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been too much for music lately. I don't know why, whether or not it has to do with work. You're too busy playing the baby's records. But I like music, and I always say, "We ought to play a stack of records on Saturday or Sunday." But we never do. Somehow I wind up watching football games, just like any other piece of stone on Sunday afternoon.

O'BRIEN: Have you felt the influence of Albert Camus?

WILLIAMS: Maybe. I don't really know. I just don't know. These are things I think about. I can't say I consciously move about as a devotee of any particular philosophy.

O'BRIEN: Which of your novels are you most pleased with?

WILLIAMS: Well, I guess that I keep changing novels because I do different things with each one. Out of two previously published novels my preference was for *Sissie*. That was before I wrote *The Man Who Cried I Am*. I felt that in that novel I said things better and with a vehicle that had infinitely more horsepower. In *Captain Blackman,* I think something different is taking place and I think that I brought that off well. So, I liked that too. Maybe when I am sixty or seventy years old I can look back and really see the differences and see which one I like. But now, things keep changing. I like *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light,* least of all.

O'BRIEN: Why is that?

WILLIAMS: It's a potboiler. I just feel that it came too easily. It was one of those novels that I don't like very much, that I call a "straight ahead" novel. You start at A and wind up at Z and then you get off the train.

O'BRIEN: Has *The Man Who Cried I Am* had the most critical acclaim?

WILLIAMS: That is what I keep hearing. But I think I hear it for the wrong reasons. People keep talking about "King Alfred." There were many other things in that novel besides "King Alfred," but all they talk about is "King Alfred." I can't say that that pleases me too much, although I believe there exists such a plan as this. The acclaim has been political. I wouldn't mind so much if it was both political and literary. But the literary acclaim has been missing.

O'BRIEN: It's been suggested that some of the characters in *The Man Who Cried I Am* are paralleled by real-life figures, that Richard Wright is represented by one of the characters and yourself by another.

WILLIAMS: I think that there are elements that could be taken as the character of Richard Wright. Actually the character that everyone thinks is me, is only me partially. I had Chester Himes in mind.

O'BRIEN: Max and Harry in that novel are two authors who are forced into becoming politically conscious and active.

WILLIAMS: I think "political" is a big word, but I think I know what you mean. And you're right. They have been forced into this kind of political role. And when I say political role, what I'm talking about is a larger humanistic role. It's outside the scope of just putting books together. The thrust may be political, per se, involving what your government is doing, but it is also an involvement in what other people are doing. It's being concerned about people, somehow relating to them, even with all their personal problems. I like to think that important writers are without flaws in terms of how they deal with other people. I feel this and sometimes say to myself that this is very childish. I think that a man who is a writer, who is good with words, should have an obligation to be a good man in his day-to-day life. It would be nice if the writer did have the responsibility to be more humane with people. Unfortunately we know that this isn't true. You can talk of Faulkner, or you can talk about Dostoevsky: bigots both.

O'BRIEN: Do you see certain similarities between the heroes in all your novels? Is it essentially the same hero?

WILLIAMS: Some people say that it's the same character in each book, that he goes through all the books. I think to a large extent they're different characters. If you wanted to be strict about it, you could say that literally they're the same character. If you wanted to be mose strict about it, you could say that they are the same two

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characters. Steve's confidant is Obie. In *Night Song* the characters would be Keel and Eagle. In *Sissie* it's Ralph and his sister. In *The Man Who Cried I Am* it's Max and Harry. In *Sons of Darkness* the two actually are Hod and his girl. In *Captain Blackman* the protagonist runs throughout the story. He's one man. He is the person around whom the whole story revolves, but there are other people who are pulled into the story as the story progresses. And they flush it out from a point of view that Captain Blackman could not possibly see it from. With two characters you can more fully develop a situation than you could with only one who would have to be babbling off at the mouth all of the time, or thinking all of the time, for the reader to get the complete story. I've always felt that I need two people to handle the dialogue, to move it, two people who know each other well. I find that too much narrative becomes a pain in the ass. You get on a roller coaster and start breaking out the flags. Dialogue is always better.

O'BRIEN: Do you see a progression in your heroes? In your first novel the hero is in search of a good job; in your most recent novel the hero starts a revolution.

WILLIAMS: Wait till you read the next one. (laughing)

O'BRIEN: Is there a difference between what Steve thinks is necessary to be human and what Eugene does?

WILLIAMS: I think so. Browning thinks in revolutionary terms out of the boredom and frustration of middle-class existence. And Steve, who hasn't had that, is thinking of getting where Browning is. He's not thinking about a revolution; he's thinking about three squares and a nine-to-five routine.

O'BRIEN: Most of your characters have a need for and are in search of love. If they find it, they are saved.

WILLIAMS: I believe in love. Which means that I live in a society. I also believe that all things, revolutions included, begin with individuals and individual choices.

O'BRIEN: Then love is looked to as a kind of ultimate solution?

WILLIAMS: I don't see that anything else has worked. Not even money. And I think that love grows out of some kind of respect. Most people just don't understand it or the processes of it. It's the only thing that can work.

O'BRIEN: There seems to be a progression from the first novel, where money is thought to be a final solution, to the second novel, where love seems to take that place.

WILLIAMS: Well, yes, but that's in the realm of books. I think economically things were better in the second novel. Not much, but better. When you get to *Sissie*, of course, ostensibly, things are even better. You've got Ralph running around Europe . . . and, it's not necessarily true, but it seems that anybody running around Europe must have the money to get back. He has some kind of economic status, however small. And as my own economic condition has improved, I think this has been matched by the conditions of the characters in my books. One of the books I'm working on now deals with a guy who has worked in a foundry for twenty-five years, but even so he owns a house in a fairly exclusive neighborhood. He's probably the only guy on the block who works with his hands. I spend a great deal of time in the opening chapter describing his kitchen, and the car that he loves (a big four-hundred-horsepower job). You've got a black man who appears to be economically solvent, and perhaps he is. But he's still black and what that really means is that he's never really secure.

O'BRIEN: The theme of racial assimilation was important in your first novel and perhaps not so important in some of the later ones. Did your views change?

WILLIAMS: I tell everybody that regardless of whatever "revolutionary movement" is now current, I think we've got assimilation and there is probably more of it, in spite of a necessary period of separatism. There's got to be integration. People are deluding themselves by saying that we won't have it. This particular neighborhood is sort of a post-Village neighborhood and the interracial couples are fairly frequent. If you had time to walk around on a nicer day you'd see it. It's pretty incredible. And there's more of it now than there was

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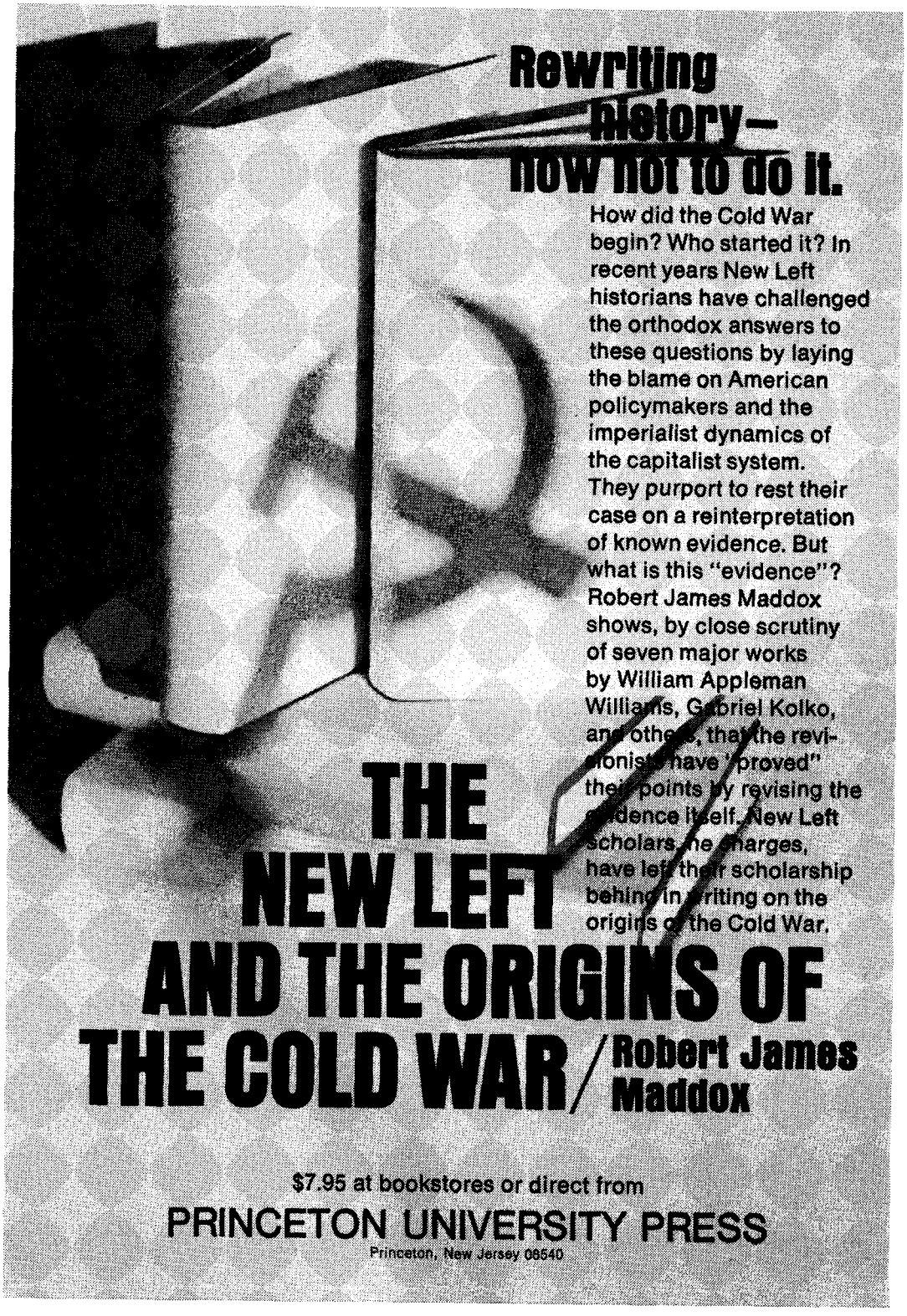

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ten or fifteen years ago. I think that there is a lot of talk going on about how little there is and how many people are opposed to it. And I'm sure that certain so-called militants really mean it when they say they're opposed to it. But I've seen changes in the philosophy of Nikki Giovanni, who lives two blocks away from here. I've been over to her place a few times, and you know she was vigorously opposed to any kind of interracial marriage. I don't know what brought about the change, certainly not us [Williams and his wife] because we're not that close. But I see changes taking place. I had a run-in with Don Lee over this situation. In his review of *The Man Who Cried I Am,* he brought in my marriage on the tail end of it. . . . I told him I thought it was out of order. We almost came to pretty good blows there. We've since made peace.

O'BRIEN: Are you conscious of your usual treatment of white liberals in your novels? Without exception, I think, they wind up exploiting blacks.

WILLIAMS: I guess I'm pretty conscious of it. And I think that's pretty much the way things are. I can say this with some assurance, since I do a lot of work in the white world; my editors are all very white, my agents have all been white. There are only a couple of black agents around, but I've never felt that I could go to an agent just because he was black. I'm not that crazy. An agent is an agent, just like a publisher is a publisher. It's a moneymaking proposition. But I've been, over a period of years, depressed about some of my white friends. I know white liberals very well. I've known white liberals, friends, who showed me the guns they brought in from Colorado or New Mexico. And I say, "What do you want that for?" "Well, just in case." "In case of what?" "Well, you know. . . ." Everybody's worried about black people getting guns, but if they ever had a shakedown in some of the middle-class apartments around this city, it would be incredible. Absolutely. I don't want to be misleading here. I have many white friends whom I don't categorize as being liberal, conservative, or anything else. I try to deal with them as people and I feel that they deal with me as a person. I don't think there is more that can be asked of a relationship across the races except mutual respect.

O'BRIEN: Racial guilt, which you discuss in your introduction to *Sissie,* is a recurring theme in your novels. Do you consider this one of your major themes?

WILLIAMS: It could very well be, and I have personally felt some of this, though to a lesser degree now. When you are the first one in your family in seven or eight generations to go to college at a great sacrifice to yourself and your family, there has to be some degree of guilt. But my older kid is now in graduate school and he's teaching, and he's married. And number two is a junior at Cornell. So the pattern is started. Nobody is going to have to feel guilty about going to college, as silly as that was.

O'BRIEN: How can your characters escape from the enormous guilt they feel?

WILLIAMS: Well, I suppose if they are going to be my characters in my books, they relate to the idea that, with time, one feels less and less. I would imagine that . . . well, for example, the book I'm working on now. The foundry worker has a son who is at Columbia. And there's no sense of guilt there. All the guys his age have kids away at school. That's the thing to do now. I would suppose that the longer I live and the more I write, the less I feel personally. And this will be reflected in my characters.

O'BRIEN: Must your characters (I think here especially of the characters in *Sissie*) come to some understanding of themselves and their situation before they can be relieved of the guilt?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I think coming to an understanding of what happened gives the release. And understanding often comes with time. If you're dealing with a novel, you're restricted by time and space. So, you've got to set up certain things to make this happen.

O'BRIEN: You suggest in the preface to *Sissie* that the matriarchal system in America is a myth. Who invented the myth?

WILLIAMS: I think I say there that the white man did.

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O'BRIEN: As a way of releasing himself from responsibility?

WILLIAMS: Well, I don't know whether it would be that, or that it would be something more simple. That is, it put the black male outside the activity in the scheme of things.

O'BRIEN: In *Sons of Darkness,* Dr. Jessup represented a certain kind of radicalism in the novel. Is the thrust of the novel away from Jessup's ideas for social change and toward Eugene Browning's?

WILLIAMS: Yes, because he's the kind of guy who's around today. It's sort of like Marcus Garvey whose "back-to-Africa movement" was very much applauded by southerners, the K.K.K. guys. He could send his scouts to the South in cities where a strange black guy usually disappeared overnight. But Garvey didn't lose anybody. That's because he was working hand-in-hand with the K.K.K., not hand-in-hand, but at least they knew what he was doing and approved of it. Now Jessup is one of these guys who believes that he can make deals with the devil and come away unscorched. And Browning just never had that spirit. Browning is the kind of activist-nonactivist that all of us would like to be, so that we can press a button and set things in motion without paying the consequences. In this sense, his thing is really a big daydream.

O'BRIEN: Browning thinks he can do this without incurring any guilt?

WILLIAMS: He would like to.

O'BRIEN: Is he becoming aware at the end of the novel of those consequences?

WILLIAMS: Of course. Yes.

O'BRIEN: Has your thinking or ideas changed since you first began writing fifteen years ago? Are you surprised when you look back to see that you were thinking one thing or another?

WILLIAMS: No, I'm not. I didn't know how things would change, but I always expect things to change. What I was writing about then was what I wanted to write about. What I write about now is what I want to write about now. I think that there have been moments when, perhaps with *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light,* I gave in to the pressures around me and did a book on revolution. But I'm not sorry I did it. In the process of working it out I came to see pretty much the kind of things that would have to happen for any revolution to become a success and also the things that couldn't happen. In that book I was dealing with nine tunnels and bridges leading into Manhattan. Well, hell, since last spring when the bridge and tunnel workers had a strike, I discovered that there were something like thirty-four bridge-tunnel approaches to Manhattan. A hell of a revolutionary I'd make . . . if I thought I could seal off Manhattan at nine points, leaving twenty-five more wide open!

O'BRIEN: What have been some of the reactions to your book on Martin Luther King? Do you think that the book was misunderstood?

WILLIAMS: I don't read reviews of a book until they're out for a year. Once in a while my wife will insist that I read a particularly good or bad one. With the King book I was glad that I had made that rule. I read some of the reviews just recently. They were pretty bad. I think that the misunderstanding was willful. A lot of people wanted to misunderstand, wanted to accuse me of being a traitor, a panderer for the F.B.I. A lot of people jumped on me, a lot of people in the black community. I got beat pretty badly. I think that over the past fourteen months or so there's been a better reaction to the book than when it first came out. Again, time, you know. But I really took a beating on that. It wasn't that I didn't expect to. I just didn't anticipate the degree of ferocity. . . . There were a lot of people running around saying, "Well, he's finished as a writer. He'll never write again." You start asking yourself, "Is that really true? Am I finished as a writer?"

O'BRIEN: Why did you write the book?

WILLIAMS: I thought that it would be a good thing for the black community to understand how much we're at the mercy of the system. And, of course, nobody wanted to believe that we were that badly off. Or that we could be that easily used. That's really the answer to it. Not this year.

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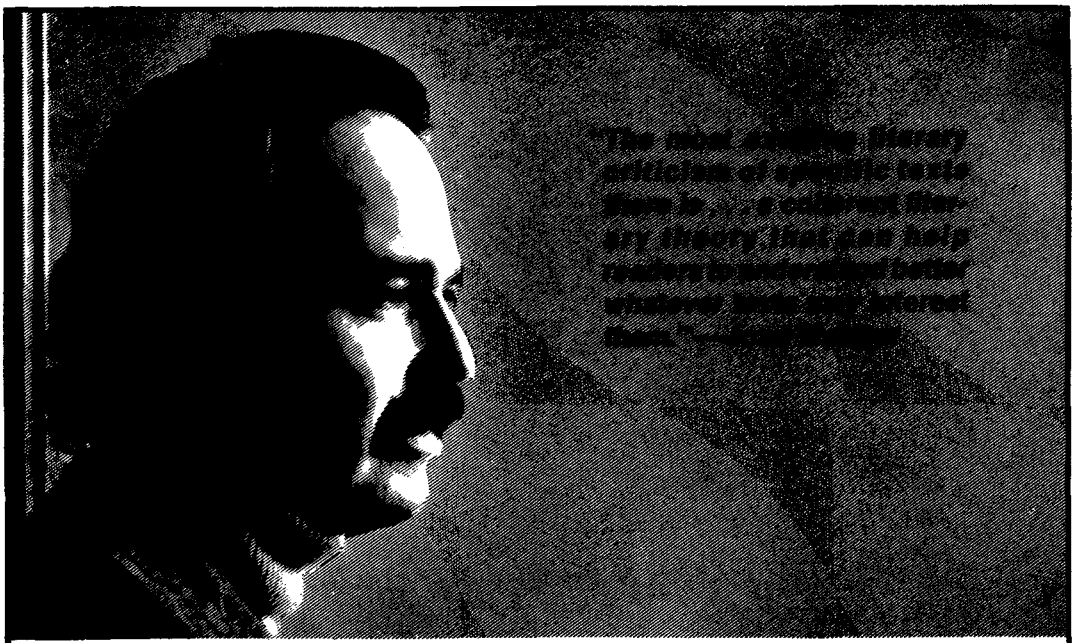

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Tampering with Reality

CHARLES THOMAS SAMUELS

By common consent, the most interesting films of the season (I write in the time warp peculiar to quarterlies) are Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie,* which won the National Society of Film Critics' top prize, and Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers,* favored by the New York Film Critics. In my judgment, the Buñuel is silly and the Bergman hollow (although brilliantly acted and photographed). Yet both films are interesting because they shed light on a central choice between fantasy and realism.

Owing to its photographic medium, the essence of cinema seems to be verisimilitude. The Lumière brothers, who startled late-nineteenth-century Parisians with moving pictures of trains, crowds and so on, are generally credited with having set the form's aesthetic identity. No sooner had they proven the camera's documentary genius, however, than another Frenchman, Georges Méliès, showed it to be an equally good tool for actualizing fantasy.

For the most part, Méliès's fantasy films were a trivial combination of vaudeville and circus; but when commercial interests began to dictate that realistic films contain narrative and that they arrange their stories according to contrived stage formulas, fantastications like those of Méliès became, arguably, no falser to life. Materializing imaginary worlds isn't any more artificial than representing human behavior through the conventions of melodrama. Nor is it necessarily more honorable. Most realistic films resemble literary best sellers, which adopt the style of realism in order to lend daydreams a comforting credibility. Fantasy films may seem to offer an alternative, sacrificing reality in the interest of truth, but most works in this mode try only to be exciting and spectacular. Between plausible daydreams and sensational fantasies, there is little difference in seriousness.

Faced with the fact that most films carry false messages or none at all, critics often shift their attention to the envelopes; commerce may cause a filmmaker to lie, but art can still express itself as invention. Audiences are also drawn toward a brilliant surface because, notoriously, most of them go to movies as an escape from life. Therefore, it is no accident that even among the handful of films that are serious, only the exotic prove widely popular. Hence directors like Fellini, Buñuel or Bergman (when he is mystical) enchant even those who don't understand their films, whereas a realist like Antonioni doesn't pull crowds until he flirts (in *Blow-Up*) with expressionism. Reality, in movies, at least, is what critics and the *hoi polloi* make common cause in shunning.

I do not want to say that movies shouldn't be diverting or that reality equals realism. Purely diverting films are pleasant, and realism (which is one style among many) is not the only way to represent truth. I do want to say that our desire to clothe a taste for thrills in some dignity shouldn't make us ascribe truthfulness to methods aimed primarily at excitement.

In special ways, Buñuel's and Bergman's films are exciting. *The Discreet Charm* has some good comic premises, titillating

✪ CHARLES THOMAS SAMUELS is the author of *The Ambiguity of Henry James* and *Encountering Directors.*

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shocks, and beautiful women wearing lovely gowns; Bergman's film is visually ravishing, dramatically sensational, and its women are even better to look at. The Buñuel also lays claim to being a serious, although comically articulated, comment on the middle class, while the Bergman purports to treat human isolation. In this, each film is pretentious.

The Discreet Charm commences as a plausible lampoon. A smartly dressed couple, the wife's sister, and their ambassador friend arrive for dinner at the house of a third couple. As might well occur, they have come a night too soon; but being urbane as well as pleasure loving, they cover their embarrassment and assuage their disappointment by insisting that the hostess accompany them to an inn. Their refusal to wait until she changes into street clothes believably marks them as oversophisticated, as does the condescension with which they choose a meal (finding the inn unfashionable, inexpensive and empty of customers, they fear that the food will be contaminated). While the men are ordering, the women wander off to a nearby room, where they discover a funeral being held for the previous owner, who had died that afternoon. This surprise is amusing but barely credible; since it comments on the greed of merchants rather than on the privileged class (the new manager explains that this restaurant is always *à service*), it is irrelevant to the film's announced subject. Henceforth, credibility and relevance fade away.

Midway in the film, a lieutenant, who has been staring at the three women from a distant table at a café, comes over, asks if they had a happy childhood, and, without further ado, recounts his own. The following memory scene, since it includes ghosts, is acceptable only as fantasy. Later, the interrupted meals that give the film a narrative motif are ever more bizarrely managed. In one, another soldier gratuitously describes a dream. Subsequent scenes turn out to be dreams by a given character or by one character about another who is also dreaming. The whole film eventually disclaims realistic status through intercuts of the six characters walking aimlessly on a road—a device that presumably symbolizes the bourgeois aimlessness of which prior scenes are the symptoms.

Buñuel's gradual erosion of reality is itself aimless, however. The dreamlike arbitrariness cannot imply, as one might suppose, that middle-class reality is as senseless as a dream. For that point to be made, Buñuel would first have to convince us that he is presenting middle-class life accurately and only exposing its fundamental illogic. Instead, the film's absurdity is Buñuel's style, not an inference about the middle class; the gradual erosion of reality is only an excuse for the preposterousness of the film's details. A true absurdist like Ionesco distorts reality to uncover some underlying truth; Buñuel, on the other hand, denies reality so as to buffer us against the pain of taking anything he shows as a judgment. This, I think, explains why middle-class moviegoers find so charming a film that consists of unrelieved and irresponsible slander against them. Since it is all a fantasy, why worry?

Critics, on the other hand, have taken the film seriously. The male half of the film's three principal couples deals in cocaine; one of the husbands easily leaves his wife in the apartment of the ambassador after discovering that she had been hiding in the man's bedroom; neither fact is a likely representation of middle-class behavior, yet the film is called an incisive satire. Many of the details aren't even this plausible. For example, the ambassador, on discovering a terrorist pretending to sell stuffed animals outside his window, obtains a carbine and shoots one; and a café, established as existing in the real world and not in a dream, runs out of both coffee and tea. Neither surprise has the remotest relationship to satire, but both induce a laugh that greets the unexpected.

The Discreet Charm is little more than a succession of switcheroos, some of which are not only unexpected but contradictory. A scene in which the original host and hostess insist on making love despite their maid's announcement of luncheon guests

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suggests a vitality, impulsiveness and disdain for social forms that are exactly contrary to the traits elsewhere ascribed to the middle class. In another scene, when an army invades the couple's dinner party and begins smoking pot, one of the three female protagonists, on learning that pot is also favored by Americans in Vietnam, steps out of character to raise the cogent objection that as a result they bomb their own troops.

But, of course, this disorderly and opportunistic little film has no consistent characters, just as it has no consistent meaning. The repeatedly interrupted dinner party lends a specious air of unity, but this plot device does not support the implication that the middle class is successfully rapacious. Several elements in the film don't even seem to belong to that subject. For instance, Buñuel introduces the character of a bishop whose parents were killed by the family gardener. For no apparent reason, the bishop applies for such a post at the house of one of the couples and is later, coincidentally, asked to confess the dying murderer. This he does, only to turn around and shoot the man. Such a sequence we owe not to the film's announced subject but to Buñuel's obsessive anticlericalism. Similarly, the long subplot about the mythical dictatorship of Miranda is not an attack against the bourgeoisie but rather, with embarrassing circumspection, a sidelong gibe at Buñuel's native Spain. As if in recognition that he had stopped dramatizing his announced subject long before the film's conclusion, Buñuel resorts to flat-out assertions in the last scene, where, for example, one of the guests reports that the traffic through which they hurried to reach their meal forced them to run over about 150 cyclists.

Half the film is neither satire nor farce. The lieutenant's memory scene, in which his dead mother advises him to murder the father who'd killed his true sire, would be horrifying were Buñuel not as inept at picturing corpses as he is fond of devising irrelevant occasions for doing so. Similarly horrific—at least by intention—is a scene in which the French police torture a suspect by placing him in a wired piano where his writhings draw music from the strings and —in a final Buñuelian touch—red cockroaches that fall on the keys as a substitute for blood.

These scenes, oddly neglected in the ecstatic notices for Buñuel's "comedy," are disjunctive in meaning as well as effect. The lieutenant's dream is slightly relevant since it ends with his assertion that the crime was never punished and so supports the presentation of a blithely criminal middle class. Even so, it goes on too long, and when we hear the second soldier's dream, we understand that both episodes contribute not to Buñuel's satire of the bourgeoisie but to his preeningly outrageous disdain for motherhood (the lieutenant's mother makes him a murderer and the soldier's mother frustrates the longing that she had gratuitously inspired).

Buñuel's film doesn't deserve to be called surrealistic because its dislocation of reality isn't dictated by theme but by narrative opportunism. Nor is it absurdist, because the details are too silly and incoherent to be taken as cogently interpretive. Rather *The Discreet Charm* is yet another sign of Buñuel's commitment to incongruity. For people in search of titillating diversion from their daily lives, switcheroos may seem exciting; but such trifling doesn't deserve to be taken as a reflection of anything significant, unless—owing to its successful reception—it reflects a middle class whose most salient fault may turn out to be a tolerance for insult.

Bergman's film is also unflattering to the middle class, which is represented by two sisters—one, vain, hypocritical, adulterous; the other, harsh, unloving, self-destructive —and their husbands, who torture or are tortured. Only a third, dying sister has any attractive qualities, but even she is less impressive than the one nonbourgeois character, a saintly maid.

Within this ambience, as always, Bergman explores human isolation, which is here ironically and temporarily mitigated by the even greater horror of death. *Cries and Whispers* is so much more artful than

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The Discreet Charm that, were I aiming at comprehensive criticism, I should have to explain how the acting, camera movements, lighting and sound track in Bergman stand as a reproach to the nonperformances, arbitrary tracking, garish colors and contradictorily naturalistic background noises in Buñuel. But I am more interested in the tampering with reality found in both films and so must neglect their wide disparity in skill.

Like Buñuel's film, *Cries and Whispers* begins realistically and gradually becomes dreamlike. Through Harriet Andersson's superb enactment, the early scenes powerfully dramatize the ordeal of dying: the yellowing skin, cadaverous cheeks, stertorous breath and pain that sets one to howling. Nothing is spared us; not the last dry retching, heartbreaking final peace, or the laying out of a corpse whose hands have already become too rigid for easy placement on its breast. But this intensely real death occurs in a context of insulting artificiality. With its limited palette of red, black and white, the physical production seems, under the circumstances, obscenely chic. And although one might argue in Bergman's defense that it is meant as a calming influence, the sensationalism of the film's events makes it seem more nearly an elegant background designed to set off horrors.

During the deathwatch the two sisters characterize themselves by remembering episodes from their past. What they recall is too sketchy for explanation and too violent for credibility. About Maria (Liv Ullmann), we learn that she has had an affair with the doctor who tended the maid's daughter and then added to this offense against marriage and motherhood a refusal to aid her husband when, immediately and melodramatically after divining her betrayal, he plunged a letter opener into his chest. Karin (Ingrid Thulin) is also badly married, although her ordeal leads to self-destruction. After a stagy scene of silent hostility while dining with her husband, she mutilates her genitals with the shard from a broken wineglass, then marches into his bedroom to offer her violated self in reproach. Credibility is even more obviously sacrificed to sensationalism here than in Maria's reminiscence. Because Bergman means us to take Karin's deed as an extreme reaction to long-standing anguish rather than as a sign of aberration, he cannot show it as clearly planned by her. But it is difficult to believe that she would have taken the shard from dining room to bedroom if she had no idea what she would do with it.

Falseness for effect overwhelms the film, when, as in Buñuel, memory gives way to dream. In the climax of *Cries and Whispers*, the dead woman comes back to life begging for comfort, only to be rejected by her sisters. Karin's refusal is complete; Maria, pliant and hypocritical, initially ministers to the ghost but bolts in terror when it grasps her. The scene ends when the maid, who had earlier taken the dying woman to her breast, similarly comforts the corpse.

This scene, fundamentally preposterous, is also redundant. What it tells us about the three women, we have already learned. Only if we take it as the maid's self-aggrandizing fantasy—it is presented as her vision—does it have any possible excuse for existing, outside of effect. The rest of the film, however, shows that the maid is a figure of pure selflessness. Were the dream ironic, it would save Bergman from the charge of class sentimentality as well as redundancy, but, obviously, we are meant to take it straight.

The pretty idea of the all-giving servant is no easier to swallow than the miracle because Kari Sylwan performs her part so badly. Physically, she is perfect—comforting girth and blankly innocent eyes—but she remains an abstraction given body without soul, since her eyes barely register emotion. The emptiness of her performance—unique in the whole range of Bergman's films—exposes the willful tendentiousness from which the role springs. As in Buñuel's film, the supernatural is invoked only to excuse the unbelievable. We conclude that the vision is assigned to the maid not as a means of characterization but only to permit a scene that Bergman wants for its

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shocking effect; since the maid is simple-mindedly pious, we can accept the fact that she might imagine such a thing.

Nonetheless, Bergman needs the scene to be more than a hallucination; he has the corpse call it a dream for the maid but not for herself. Yet the staging maintains a stylization that emphasizes unreality; for example, when, having heard the corpse moan, the maid tries to rouse the sisters, they are shown as soundlessly muttering statues.

This sort of noncooperation between image and dialogue occurs frequently in the film, even when we are not meant to think ourselves in some ambiguous twilight zone between reality and dreams. Exemplary of this flaw is the long critique of Maria's character that her lover delivers while both peer into a mirror. He comments on the "discomfort and hunger" in the once-soft mouth, on the telltale wrinkles above her eyebrows, and so on. But when the woman quite properly asks, "Can you really see all that in my face?" (he had already admitted that the wrinkles are visible only by daylight) he replies, "No, I feel it when you kiss me." This remark is like excusing the miracle by assigning it to the vision of a superstitious peasant. Bergman needs to convey this information about Maria and the nature of her affair, and he wants the effect of two actors talking directly to the audience. Intensity created by the close-up masks the clumsiness of the exposition; but the intensity is denied by the invisibility of what is "seen," so Bergman simply asks that we take the scene as a metaphor.

Bergman often permits his characters to make speeches in which they act as their own interpreters; but, at his best, he makes these part of the action (the great confession in *Persona,* for example, is extorted from the nurse by the actress's silence). In *Cries and Whispers,* the characters' revelations are inadequately motivated. Through much of the film, the crisis of death is used the way bad playwrights use alcohol—to loosen tongues. But in a scene like the lover's critique not even an atmosphere of tension is invoked to excuse the loquaciousness.

Rarely has Bergman made a film in which drama and rhetoric seem so independent. Without such devices as the blasphemous speech of the priest who delivers Agnes's eulogy, the film would even lack a theme, and its painstaking dramatization of dying might seem only clinical. Yet even that would be better than surrounding the clinical with rhetoric and sensationalism. Although Bergman wants not only to show the horror of death but to say that life is scarcely less terrible, death alone is real in *Cries and Whispers.*

Despite the vastly greater skill with which it is executed, *Cries and Whispers* is as ill-conceived as *The Discreet Charm.* Each film fails to convince us of its theme. *Cries and Whispers* implies that the anguish of death differs only from that of life in being terminal (among other indications, Karin, at one point, howls exactly as Agnes had just before her death). Yet death is recreated with recognizable accuracy whereas life is reduced to a series of attitudinizing speeches and poorly motivated outrages. Most husbands don't attempt suicide as a simple consequence of (unseen) adultery; most women, even after years of speechless meals and marital derision, don't mutilate themselves; most clergymen don't speak of living "on the dark, dirty earth under an empty and cruel sky." A dour view of life can be represented through exceptional cases, but we must be permitted to see an element of common humanity. For all its immediate power, *Cries and Whispers* can seem persuasive only to those already convinced that life is rotten, just as *The Discreet Charm* can only seem more than a vaudeville show to someone who believes that the middle class is, by definition, a pack of monsters interested only in self-gratification and suavely impervious to crime, war, or revolution.

Since I now want to argue that the season's best film is Jan Troell's realistic *The Emigrants,* let me reiterate my awareness that realism is not the only valid film mode. I have previously celebrated in these pages examples of rigorous stylization (*Une Femme Douce*) and expressionism (*Deep*

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End) because those films used intensification or exaggeration without losing credibility. Furthermore, as I have argued when discussing Hitchcock, dedication to emotional effect is a valid aim by itself so long as no pretense is made to being truthful.

Nonetheless, by capturing the look and movement of the physical universe—of which, of course, man is a central part—film expresses its formal uniqueness. If we needed reminders not only of the potential beauty in such replication but of its power to inspire and enlighten, *The Emigrants* provides them. Troell's is not only a good but a great film.

This greatness is, however, difficult to describe. Recounting events from Bergman's or Buñuel's film or quoting some of their dialogue conveys a good idea of what each film means to say and of how it does or does not move us. Physical imagery is frequently disjunctive in *Cries and Whispers* (although the actresses' faces are crucial and superb), and in *Discreet Charm* one can nearly close his eyes after a first view of the characters' studied elegance, so redundant and visually inept is Buñuel, so inattentive to what is neither verbal nor conceptual. *The Emigrants,* on the other hand, lives in its images. Everything is said by golden sails against a blue sky above green water, by the weary, worried faces of the travelers, by the serpentine water oozing like oil after a storm, by the dazzling flash of a red waterwheel in intense close-up when the emigrants reach the promised land and see their first steamboat. For a film that lasts three hours and ten minutes, less than fifty triple-spaced typescript pages are necessary to record the dialogue.

Unfortunately, the film's greatness has almost been put beyond American audiences. Fearing commercial failure with what has been ballyhooed as the first recent gamble by a major American distributor on a foreign film, Warner Brothers cut Troell's original from 190 minutes to some 140. The film's favorable but unpassionate press may, in part, be explained by this fact (but, Warner Brothers would argue, so would its decent showing at the box office). The result, nonetheless, disfigures a masterpiece because the corporate butchers cut frames and trimmed scenes virtually everywhere.

Someday, some lucky scholar, by comparing prints of the original and cut *Emigrants,* will be able to document the apparently instinctive Hollywood conviction that life is a well-made play. In films that are conventionally plotted, this instinct inspires efficiency and conciseness—virtues typical even of unimpressive American films. But Troell wants to approximate the randomness and lack of emphasis in real life. Warner Brothers, instead, brought his film (which I was able to see uncut in Stockholm) as close to slick narrative practice as it could.

Troell's adaptation of Vilhelm Moberg's four-volume novel shows why the Swedes came to America, documents the ordeal of their migration, and ends with the settlers' arrival in Minnesota (a second film, *The New Land,* will trace their subsequent experience). To encapsulate a complex historical phenomenon without lessening its dimensions, Troell disclaims all abstracting or nondocumentary intentions. As I presume the novel does, the film exemplifies the migration through a small group of characters with whom we can easily identify. Prominent among these are a young couple, Karl Oskar and Kristina, Karl Oskar's younger brother, Robert, and a priest uncle named Danjel. We see how poverty, agricultural failures and family tragedy impel the couple, how Robert is attracted away from his apprenticeship to a cruel farmer by the promise of freedom, and how religious persecution drove out men like Danjel. Troell transcends the efficient limits of paradigm implied by this conventional use of representative figures (although his means are interfered with in the reediting).

Most apparent are quick brushstrokes in the background of the canvas. For example, when the protagonists' ship nears America, Troell, for this once, shows another ship alongside, startling us with a fact obscured by our emotional investment in the principals: what we have been witnessing was, in the actuality, multiplied many times over. This could not be altered, but throughout the film Warner Brothers cut similar re-

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minders of the protagonists' surroundings: starving children hovering around the kitchen where Kristina cooks, for example, or the appearance of an old man on crutches when she and Karl Oskar are walking away from their burned barn. By such brief details, often unremarked even by the characters, Troell lets us infer social conditions that help to explain the migration. Warner Brothers, in the manner of most American producers, will not risk asking their customers to infer anything and so tightens scenes for the very blatancy of explanation that Troell has labored to avoid.

The Emigrants disavows explanation precisely so as to immerse us in what seems a bare chronicle of daily life. Although Troell is, artfully, giving us data pertinent to comprehension, in order to draw us into the process of comprehending, he forswears narrative highlighting, interpretive emphasis, explanatory dialogue, symbolism—all discursive devices that abstract or distill.

Essential to this effect is the peculiar way in which he intercuts events from the lives of Karl Oskar, Robert and Danjel. Narrative intercutting is conventionally used to link spatially or temporally separated units and thus to diminish our sense of the distance between them. A director interested in narrative thrust, will, therefore, move us along quickly through visual connectives or analogies between scenes that increase tempo or establish narrative causality. Troell, on the other hand, wishes to avoid obvious manipulation or interpretive signals and to maintain our sense of large stretches of time even though he is showing only a small part of what happened; hence, he uses transitional bridges sparingly and does not try to link all his scenes. Sometimes, he will even confuse us about which of the stories we have entered; often, he will delay the narrative point of an episode so that we believe we are witnessing a vignette from daily life when we are really seeing a fact that will later be recalled as having helped to explain the characters' motives. This seeming neglect of pertinence and consequence allows each moment to stand out in itself, thereby focusing our attention on its actuality rather than on its contribution to narrative meaning. Troell's calculated jaggedness has been polished by Warner Brothers into the smooth turning of a historical saga (although certain sequences have been ground down too far, so that they seem not jagged but incoherent). Several untouched sequences remain, fortunately, to indicate how Troell, by arranging narrative eddies, simulates the actual flow of time.

One sequence in particular serves to exemplify both this and Troell's determination that no event achieve more emphasis than it would have for his stoical characters, even if such determination forces him to neglect a seductive opportunity for spectacle: Karl Oskar's barn burns, ruining a crop that he had brought in after a year of drought. The flames are beautiful and dramatic, but Troell shows only enough of them to establish that they happened. We next have a brief scene of the couple's reaction to the devastation and then immediately cut to a hat seen above a wall, so that it takes us moments to understand that we have been brought into Robert's story again, leaving Karl Oskar and Kristina to deal with their problems beyond our view. Instead of conventionally dramatizing the causal relations between one big moment and another, Troell lets some of them develop offscreen; the first part of *The Emigrants* creates a sense of ongoing lives, which we are privileged to witness from time to time.

The vividness of life and ubiquity of death are also exemplified by one of the few sequences entirely cut from this version. Very early in the original film, Robert drowns an ailing cat, pelting the animal with stones in order to put it out of its misery. This poignant scene is abruptly terminated; only about two hours of playing time later does it assume any importance—when Robert is sick on the way to America and thinks that he is being made to repent for the cat.

Death is the constant that both qualifies the film's essential optimism and adds poignance to the dream about America through which this optimism is expressed. Hardship, including the death of a child

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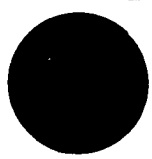

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and the continued threat of starvation that is implicit in Kristina's fecundity, is the principal motive for Kristina and Karl Oskar's emigration. En route, Danjel's wife dies and, later, his child; Kristina nearly dies as well; funerals of minor characters punctuate the journey, which is also bedeviled by bad food, seasickness, lice. When they reach America, they learn that an even longer journey awaits them, for they must cross a vast land.

The second part of the film, which records the hardships of the trip, provides vicarious experience as vividly as anything ever filmed. Even more brilliant, because its immediacy is also so economical and so illuminating about the characters, is the superb docking sequence.

Troell's photography and construction convey the moment's excitement without inflation or sentimentality. We see both the setting foot on shore and the teeming life of the dock, both subjective shots of what the emigrants see and reaction shots of the Americans (even shots of one crowd seen through the other crowd); Troell does not let us forget that the thrill of arrival must have been qualified by logistical confusion and the fear of being a stranger. With a tactfulness that seems breathtaking, Troell also permits us to note—very briefly—blacks in chains, wastrels and harlots. No visual underlining is given; we are only expected to remember that very early in the film Robert had read from a book proclaiming America a land exclusively composed of free men and successes. Troell even achieves here a moment of visual poetry. From Kristina's vantage as she is lolling on the grass, he cuts to a blinding shot of the sun, then tracks quickly down to her as she clutches the grass as if in terror, only to realize that she is not under attack but rather basking in dazzlement.

Visual dazzlement is, indeed, the style of the film; but, unlike the pretty *Cries and Whispers, The Emigrants* makes gorgeousness discursive. Central to its meaning is the natural beauty that makes leaving Sweden a plan thinkable only in extremity and arriving in America a solace because it, too, is beautiful. Dazzling as well is the acting in this film—above all, by Max von Sydow and Liv Ullmann (as Karl Oskar and Kristina), who perform the miracle of making you forget that they are stars, not peasants, and stars trained by Bergman in a style as far from Troell's understated naturalism as could be imagined.

In addition to being an extraordinarily beautiful film and one of the few that deserves to be called epic, *The Emigrants* is free from false drama, from sentimentality and manipulation. It captures a historical experience with the intimacy required for identification and the scope required for understanding, and every frame is shot, lighted, staged and conceived as if it were the last. Not intellectually complex or emotionally various, it nonetheless provides food enough for thought and feeling through the amplitude of its representation and the artfulness of its means. "Reverence for life" is a grandiose phrase, but *The Emigrants* makes you understand what it can mean. By contrast, Buñuel's and Bergman's films express little more than reverence for their creators' dreams. Dreams may be this season's winners, but reality will remain our champion.

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DUNCAN KENWORTHY

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The literary scholar who is also a poet is an object of curiosity. The *outstanding* scholar who is also an *outstanding* poet is a phenomenon. Donald Davie must qualify. Since his first book of poetry was published in England in 1955, however, this dual recognition has not come automatically. In England his growing stature has generally kept pace with both his poetic and scholarly output, but on this side of the Atlantic his main reputation has rested on his unquestioned distinction as an academic: an influential professor of literature at England's University of Essex, where his works of scholarship brought him an international readership, he is at present professor of English at Stanford University. With the recent publication here, however, of his *Collected Poems 1950-1970,* it seems likely that his academic reputation will be joined by a perhaps more impressive one—that of important modern poet.

Unfortunately, the academic/poet—especially one who has the bad taste to be valued by his academic colleagues—starts life somewhat disadvantaged by the suspicion of his audience. How can the poet fail to be constricted by the teacher, the visionary straitjacketed by the sober theorist? We warily anticipate the Poetic Didact.

Whether it is actually cause or effect, this split does parallel something of which Davie has been continuously aware in himself. In a revealing 1957 note, he admits: "I am not a poet by nature, only by inclination; the idea comes into my mind more readily than the sensuous experience. . . ." Does he, he wonders in "Obiter Dicta," "do more than snap the elastic band/ Of rhyme" about "those cold eggs, Great Truths"? Although several early poems *are* too clinically achieved, the answer is undoubtedly "yes." For whatever Davie's occasional misgivings, the rugged harmony and insights of much of this early poetry—for example, "Under St. Paul's" or "Hawkshead and Dachau in a Christmas Glass"—are perfectly fused, and some of the poems reveal a mysterious undertow achieved precisely because of, rather than in spite of, the hard brilliance of the texture.

Since the ghost-laying of that 1957 note, Davie's poetic ambitions have coalesced around one central aim: the development of a poetry of *sculpture.* It is through shaping his poetry like stone that the "lapidary moralist" makes each poem an "authentic widening of experience"—"by the inhu-

✪ A Scholar of Christ's College, DUNCAN KENWORTHY read English at Cambridge, where he took a First in 1971. He has just completed two years' study as a Thouron Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania.

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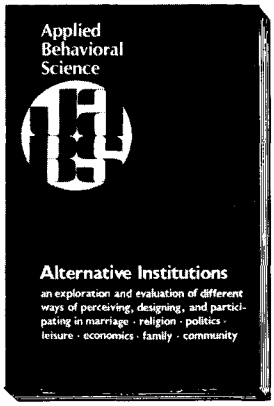

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man labour of thwarting at every point the [poet's] natural grain and bent. . . ." Davie's increasing, and otherwise somewhat puzzling, poetic preoccupation with history here reaches significance. Its value lies in being a mode of experience to which his mind is normally closed. Unfamiliarity imposes a discipline which, like Wordsworth's "recollection in tranquility," can concentrate experience into poetry. "To A Brother in the Mystery, *Circa 1290*," perhaps Davie's best poem, both describes and demonstrates the tautness that this chiseling against the grain creates in art:

> The medium is its own
> Thing, and not all a medium, but the stuff
> Of mountains; cruel, obdurate, and rough.

Of course the poetry itself must finally verify the theory, not the theory the poetry, by standing alone. And so it does, admirably. The skeletal, barbered verse of *The Forests of Lithuania* and of the bulk of his poetry in the 1960s highlights the development of Davie's poetic mastery of experience. Seemingly artless, most of these later poems—for example, "A Christening," "A Winter Landscape near Ely," or "Behind the North Wind"—move to a complex meaning with consummate ease. Impossible now to isolate technique:

> the mote-dance in the air
> Of their vacated cabins where
> Sea-glitters pulsed above his head
> Bent to his books.

The publication of this volume should mark Davie's recognition here as an important modern poet.

On the face of it, A. R. Ammons has much in common with Davie. He, too, is both poet and academic—professor of English at Cornell University—and has just published a twenty-year collection: *Collected Poems 1951-1971* (given the 1973 National Book Award for poetry). At that point, all similarity ends.

For where Davie is the poet of sculptured discipline, Ammons is the poet of perception, of vision as experience. Like Louis MacNeice, the "I" of Ammons's poetry feels "the drunkenness of things being several," but instead of fusing the separateness of creation in one mind, he holds it as it is, utterly particularized, in an orgy of precision. No matter how numerous the bricks, for him no building emerges; the whole of experience is always *less* than the sum of its parts: "Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events/I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting/ beyond the account." Everything, in fact, is "magnificent with existence," and must be "interpenetrated" individually.

The nature of poetry and the place of art in this world are hazy. Certainly there must be no coalescing into significance, for this presupposes reduction. Similarly, the value of poetry cannot be located in the charting of a man's mind by its principles of ordering, for there *are* no such principles. Indeed, rather than a single mind, the "I" seems to be the eternal inhabitant, not a creator, but The Pen, taking notes to the world's dictation: "not so much looking for the shape/ as being available/ to any shape that may be/ summoning itself/ through me. . . ." Even he is unsure of his function, wondering "how I fell into this backwater,/ verse: oh what is the efficacy of/ this lowgrade hallucination, this rhythm not even/ a scientific sine curve." For a poetry of perception, of course, this is the problem:

> The word is
> not the thing.

Everything in this poetry, especially the shape of the verse, must be as unforced as in nature. Instead of a "sine curve," the poetry plots an accidental graph across the page, as if pushed by the uncertain meanderings of high tide. Word follows word, line follows line, not in any imposed exemplum of rhythm, but purely to emphasize the separateness of things.

The supreme principle is freedom. The freedom of "I," the experiencer, to chart his own course, his freedom to write what *he* wants ("you want to hear me describe

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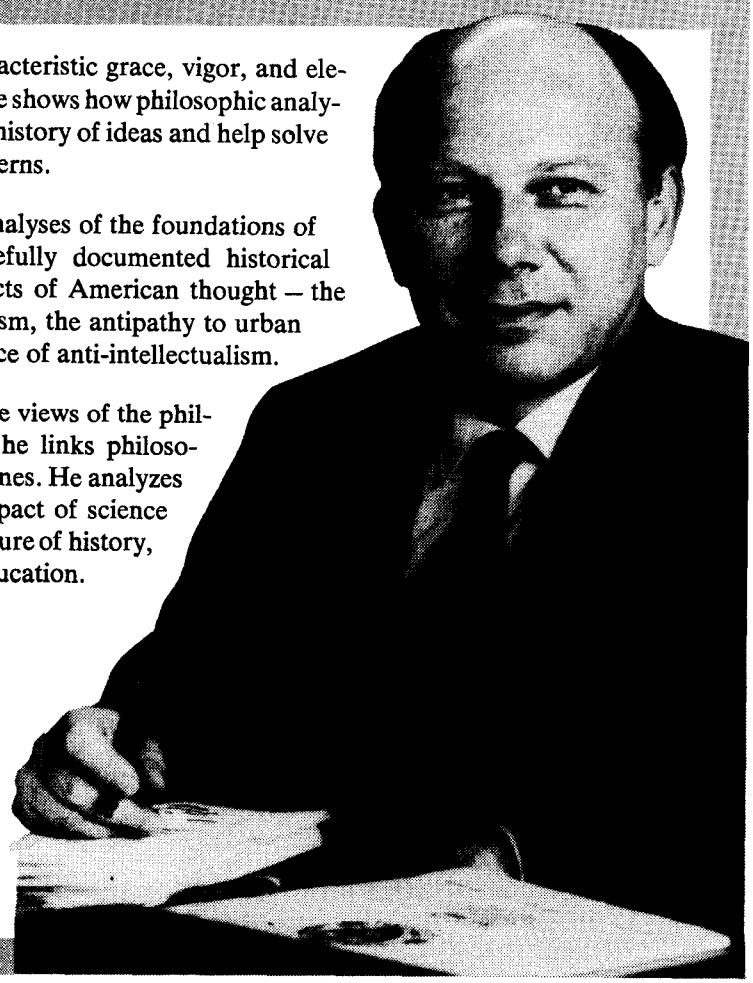
A seminal thinker tackles
the problems of American society

Pragmatism and the American Mind

Essays and Reviews in Philosophy and Intellectual History

By Morton White



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it,/ to placate the hound's-mouth/ slobbering in your own heart:/ I will not tell you"). And ultimately, as he realizes, the freedom of the *reader* to choose within the choice presented: "I change shape,/ turn easily into the shapes you make."

That there is beauty here is undeniable. With reasonable randomness one might mention "Corson's Inlet," "Gravelly Run," "Here and Now," "Concentrations," "September Drift." But it seems to be almost an accidental beauty, the occasional nodal culmination of chance in four hundred pages of series—the beauty of driftwood. A child playing with shattered fragments of perception may produce beautiful kaleidoscopic configurations, but this is autism, not art.

Fortunately, however hard the "I" may try, he cannot always obliterate the supremacy of "mind," the connecting principle. In the very process of experiencing or scanning, it is *human attention*—the "tabula" on which perception is written—that receives a constant emphasis. The sight of a consciousness *coming to grips with* the sensate:

> I see no
> god in the holly, hear no song from
> the snowbroken weeds:

It is in these acts of *understanding* that Ammons's poetry for me finds its only really effective achievement. How unfortunate, then, that the poet tries so hard—so often successfully—to avoid them.

In the Terrified Radiance gives us Stanley Burnshaw's forty-nine new poems, together with a selection from his earlier volumes. Unlike Davie's and Ammons's collections, the latest poems come first. This is a pity, since there is a definite development through Burnshaw's career, from the intellectual pragmatism of his first collections to *The Seamless Web* (1970), his best-known publication. The thesis of this work of Coleridgean art-philosophizing—the physical basis of mind—reverberates throughout Burnshaw's new poems.

The title is at first misleading, too "aesthetic" an oxymoron to convey the grim rigor of the poems. For laid out here is a godless world, where man "walks the middleground/ In search of clues that his body/ Lost." The early poems address this situation through sensate imagery, indicating man's original kinship with nature, before the "finding light" was wrung from him, and he (literally) lost touch. Now, "Tangled in skeins/ Of will and knowledge," he must try to regain his lost unity.

Despite the elemental nature of this vision, the poems hold to no simple vitalism. Somewhere, everywhere, there are "presences," ancestor-spirits: "Their Singing River" reveals a tantalizing vision of the Orphic fusion these spirits offer. There *is* an eden (small e, notice), however unattainable. Later poems offer it temptingly, mirage-like. It is never reached. Ultimately, perhaps, the only value lies in straining toward it—the poetic leap of Stoic Mallarmé.

The texture of these poems is dense, the imagery well defined and quietly intense. Each poem's totality presents a measured tone nicely conveying the ingrained pessimism, bleak and heavy, but without bitterness. And under it all, the execution maintains a passionate intelligence, whether inspecting the "withered Donne . . . begging/ The gaze of his gods," or engaged with Mallarmé's less tangible concerns. If there is a fault, it lies with the smaller rhythms of the lines. The relentlessness is there, but the rhythms are too much the rhythms of conscious thought to carry the body-in-mind fusion completely. Nevertheless a fine, stirring, distinguished volume.

Lawrence Raab's first published volume of poetry, *Mysteries of the Horizon,* provides an enormous contrast with the dark tone of Burnshaw's work. Surrounding most of the thirty-nine poems is a lyric stillness, a calm. With a surprising coherence and unity of purpose, almost all achieve their effect in a nonlinear fashion, not so much contrasting image with image as exposing the *internal* significance of images. They have resonances rather than meanings, and these resonances reverberate inwards.

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New from WESLEYAN

for your summer reading

Regeneration Through Violence

The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860

by Richard Slotkin

Richard Slotkin's provocative thesis is that an entire set of national attitudes and traditions informing our literature and defining our social responses has evolved from the myth of the hunter-hero struggling in a savage new world to claim the land, to displace the Indian.

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M: Writings '67-'72

by John Cage

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The Connecticut River

Photographs by William Stekl,
Text by Evan Hill
Introduction by Roger Tory Peterson,
Foreword by Abe Ribicoff

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By Robert G. Albion, William A. Baker, and Benjamin W. Labaree;
Marion V. Brewington, Picture Editor

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The American Maritime Library: Volume V. Published for The Marine Historical Association, Mystic Seaport.

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The volume is divided into three sections. It soon becomes clear that this number was not idly chosen; from the first poem's "Turn three times around, close/ the left eye only, and I grow," the figure is given a mystical dimension. Other images, too, are lent magical stature—openings and beginnings, paths, a bird, words themselves, the wind. They are funds of significance, symbols that strike some chord in every reader. Whether drawn from medieval illuminations, Beardsley's *Le Morte d'Arthur* or the Tarot—"a white tree blossoming in a thorny road"—or even from Navajo art, they are equally evocative.

This iconic quality is deftly employed in three poems inspired by paintings. "The Dream of Rousseau" is especially good, its languid rhythms conveying motion *in stasis,* the sleep of the gypsy side by side with the painting's frozen moment of time:

and then what happened?

The moonlight continued to fall
on the silver river and on the silver hills
and across each color of the gypsy's dress
like the songs her lute
propped between pillow and jug
might remember

Most of the best poems come, I think, from the first section, particularly "The Hero On His Way Home." In them, as in the collection as a whole, it is the rhythmic control and consistently achieved tone—as much as the mythic clarity of the images—which impress most. Like a medieval illumination, a bright beginning.

Braving the Elements, James Merrill's sixth volume of poetry, gives us Merrill at his maturest, and is, quite simply, a rare delight. The total display of its twenty-four substantial poems is pyrotechnic, demonstrating a breadth of tone and poetic craft that renders the individual success of the most outstanding poems all the more satisfying. One's feeling throughout is the smiling envy of watching an expert at work in his own medium. Certainly the tools are now there: ringingly clear tone, intelligence both complex and self-ironic, vigorous rhythmic control, and, above all, a fingertip instinct for the manipulation of images.

Several poems, narrative in style, are autobiographical, but they never lose creative control. Whether taking a gently ironic look, in "After The Fire," at the "old and merciless" mother of his housekeeper in Greece:

Beyond her, bedclothes disarrayed,
The little leaden oven-rosy witch
Fastens her unrecognizing glare
Onto the lightest line that I can spin.

or assimilating the old break with his friend in "Strato in Plaster" (the fractured arm a succinct metaphor for their relationship), there is always a separation of "the man who suffers, and the mind which creates" (Eliot).

Particularly fine are "Under Libra," "Syrinx," "18 West 11th Street," and "In Nine Sleep Valley," the latter's nature mosaics ruggedly executed:

Geode, the troll's melon
Rind of crystals velvet smoke meat blue
Formed far away under fantastic
Pressures, then cloven in two
By the taciturn rock shop man, twins now forever

To this sort of imagistic precision, "Under Libra" and "Syrinx" add a more complex intellectual strain with no loss of delicacy. Here, again, the originality is surprising and impressive, whether spelling out a mathematical rhythm:

Like

$$\sqrt{\left(\frac{x}{y}\right)^n} = 1$$

—or equals zero, one forgets—

or translating the four winds into an image of pain:

Nought
Waste Eased
Sought

Moreover, it is an originality never allowed

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Roger Williams'
A KEY INTO THE LANGUAGE OF AMERICA
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In 1643 Roger Williams, a New England Puritan, wrote a dictionary of the language of the Narragansett Indians. He used his exploration of words as a vehicle to offer a detailed discussion of the customs, manners, and religion of the Indian culture.

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the costly luxury of self-justification. Here —as throughout this really excellent volume—Merrill's precision is tightly focused by one central creative impulse: a ringingly acute, yet always robust, insight into the human element of experience.

A loving sense of the individual in history is not something we usually associate with the dialectic of revolutions. Nonetheless it floods Alice Walker's *Revolutionary Petunias* from the first page's motto: "We remember [our ancestors] because it is an easy thing to forget: that we are not the first to suffer, rebel, fight, love and die." Always vigorously honest, the poems are given a strength and authenticity by this perspective. Ignoring proscriptive calls for black art radically to reorder the Western cultural aesthetic, Walker takes from the past what she sees of value in it, and builds from there.

According to their author, the poems in this volume—Walker's second collection—are "about Revolutionaries and Lovers; and about the loss of compassion, trust and the ability to expand in love that marks the end of hopeful strategy." The flowers in the title form a complex, positive image, far removed from the watery emotionalism of "flower power." They make us see old men at a funeral, "More awkward/ With the flowers/ Than with the widow/ After they'd put the/ Body in," and a husband-murdering backwoods woman still preoccupied with life on the way to the electric chair: "Don't yall forgit to *water*/ my purple petunias."

Interestingly, the volume seems to have been conceived as an organic whole, with a definite progression from the beginning to the closing note of hope. Not that the beginning is not itself hopeful enough, the early, autobiographical poems looking at childhood with a fine humor. There are children, at funerals or Sunday School, "Three feet high/ Heads bowed/ Leaning into/ Bosoms"; births, and uncles and old folks. Life in the face of larger realities.

The other poems, too, have this simplicity—one that does not deny sophistication. "Black Mail" is beautifully executed, the ambiguous title complementing the viciously tactile imagery:

> Stick the finger inside
> the chink;
> nail long and sharp.
> Wriggle it,
> *jugg,*
> until it draws blood.

And "For My Sister Molly Who in the Fifties" is equally complex. It *is,* however, an uncompromising style, well suited to a simple, yet revolutionary, message—we must all "keep ourselves trusting, which is to say, vulnerable." As petunias.

Theory and Revolution

ESSAY ON HUMAN FEELING, Volume 2. *By Susanne Langer. Johns Hopkins University Press. $12.50.*

Reviewed by MARC ROSENBERG

Behind the dramatic techniques and social ramifications of every scientific revolution, one always finds a new conceptual framework. The physical revolution, which has put its stamp on our century, had as its basis new ways of thinking about time and space, energy and matter, objectivity and subjectivity. Similarly, the biological revolution, which is now in full swing, has many of its roots in the new concepts derived from the information sciences, from cybernetics and from systems theory.

There is, however, still no single, all-embracing conceptual framework capable of organizing all the data with which biologists characteristically concern themselves. It is to this lack that Susanne Langer claims to have addressed herself in the second volume of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling.*

In this volume (which constitutes part

MARC ROSENBERG, a peripatetic student, is currently on the faculty of Indiana-Purdue University at Indianapolis, where he teaches courses in communication theory, popular culture, and interdisciplinary studies.

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New Books for the Summer

An Indian Canaan:
Isaac McCoy and the Vision of an Indian State
By GEORGE A. SCHULTZ
Foreword by Robert E. Bell
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Foreword by Henry Steele Commager
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Edited by Francis Paul Prucha
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four of a proposed six-part study), Dr. Langer develops an expanded theory of instinct and attempts to demonstrate that all nonhuman behavior can be explained in purely instinctual terms, without recourse to the ethological anthropomorphizations to which she so strongly objects: "I hold that all animal behavior is instinctive, arising from organic sources as impulse seeking expression in motor action, and guided to direct or indirect consummation by acts of perception." And: "The literature of ethology, though not yet old, is already large, and has established a language of its own embodying highly anthropomorphic concepts which go unchallenged because they are brought in as part of the jargon rather than as explicit assumptions with recognized and accepted implications."

Much of this study is, therefore, devoted to a reinterpretation of the ethological data in an attempt to free it from anthropomorphism and bring it into conformity with Dr. Langer's instinct theory. Thus, for example, "The emotional feeling expressed in the cowering posture" is not an example of social communication (according to Dr. Langer, animals do not engage in communication, and the concept of an animal society is a "naïve anthropomorphism") but "may be viewed, hypothetically, as desperation, being overwhelmed by circumstances"; and "The intensity of emotion which pervades such a spontaneous gesture of giving up the struggle runs through every quiver, every erecting feather or hair on the loser's skin, and in a mammal through every sweat gland exuding the smell of terror. In this extremity the presumptive destroyer suddenly suffers an empathic pseudo-identification with his victim and, for the instant, cannot strike."

One can see in this example the nature of the conceptual gulf separating Dr. Langer from the ethologists. While they are mainly concerned with the gesture itself as part of an intraspecific communication system, Dr. Langer is concerned with the "emotional feeling" expressed in the gesture. While they are concerned with the effects of one animal's behavior on another, Dr. Langer seeks the cause of those effects in "empathic pseudo-identification."

For a philosophy of mind in which the concept of feeling ("anything that can be felt") plays a prominent part, it may be appropriate to substitute an intrapsychic anthropomorphism for a social one. But such a substitution merely shifts the anthropomorphism from an observable (social) level of organization to one that must remain unobservable and therefore hypothetical. It is doubtful that such a shift will be of any benefit to those who must concern themselves with the observation and systematization of animal behavior.

Any book that attempts a radical revision of a currently accepted conceptual framework owes it to itself and to its subject matter to deal with the best thinking that has occurred within that framework. To do otherwise results in a vitiation of the critique of the old framework and renders any new conceptualization unconvincing. And often, it seems that Dr. Langer has been so anxious to beat her favorite straw men that she has blinded herself to relevant and powerful ideas. Thus, she can say that "in the jargon of today's psychology 'information' means any influence of anything on anything" and totally ignore the very useful distinctions that have been made between energy and information. In speaking of schizophrenia, she refers to the "'word salad,' which sounds like conversation but really contains no comprehensible statements." Such an assertion, in view of the very important research in schizophrenic communication conducted by Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, R. D. Laing and others, must be regarded as nonsense.

To the misconceptions must be added the omissions. Admittedly, no amount of research and synthesis can hope to deal with all the relevant data in our very rich informational environment. Yet there are contemporary scholars and events of such importance that one must wonder at their absence from this very lengthy and exhaustively documented study. Gregory Bateson and Arthur Koestler have concerned themselves for years with issues directly relevant to Dr. Langer's thesis. Yet she completely

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New from Yale

The World Without a Self

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by James Naremore

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Architecture and Urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia

by Norma Evenson

Combining a sympathetic understanding of man's habits and needs as a city user, a year of research in Brazil, and her skills as an architectural historian, Norma Evenson here examines Brazilian urban design and architecture in terms of the modern development of the old capital, Rio de Janeiro, and the new capital, Brasilia. In her analysis of Rio and Brasilia as both functioning cities and symbolic capitals, she illuminates the problems and processes—political, economic, and social—of urbanization in a developing country. Over 200 plans and photographs, many never before published, enhance the text. $19.50

Crab Antics

Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean

by Peter J. Wilson

"You have a barrel of crab and they start to climb. The one that climbs the highest, all the others are pulling him back. If he ever reached the top, he'd have to be a big strong crab." On Providencia, a tiny island in the southwest Caribbean, the metaphor of "crab antics" is commonly used to illustrate the dynamics of social life. For Peter Wilson, who spent over a year on the island, crab antics became a key image in his attempt to identify and analyze the standards by which people judge each other's worth, and to explain how values of social differentiation provide a basis for social order. $10.00

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ignores them. Surely one would expect that any discussion of biological thinking would have to deal with Ludwig von Bertalanffy and the general system theorists. But they are treated only *en passant*. The same is true of Chomsky and Piaget, certainly central figures in any speculation on the nature of mind. Despite the very exciting current research being carried on in biofeedback control, Dr. Langer can speak placidly of "autonomic activity." And one must wonder if any theory of mental processes can be complete without at least some reference to the effects of the psychedelic drugs.

The questions raised by Dr. Langer are often interesting and important. But she has neither answered them nor formulated them so that they might be answered. The biological revolution is perhaps the most important event to occur in our time. But the task of organizing its data within a coherent conceptual framework has still to be done.

In Quest of Sam Fathers

REGENERATION THROUGH VIOLENCE: THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER, 1600-1860. *By Richard Slotkin. Wesleyan University Press. $25.*

Reviewed by JOHN DITSKY

Wesleyan University's Richard Slotkin has completed what is in many ways a remarkable book, apparently an extension of his doctoral research on the Indian-fighter narratives of pre-Civil War America. As a cultural history, *Regeneration Through Violence* carefully examines the relationship between changing attitudes of what Slotkin calls "Euro-Americans" toward the moving frontier—especially as represented in its Indian population—and the developing notion of a national identity—particularly as embodied in the emergence of the frontiersman as national hero. Although Slotkin's generally lucid analyses of texts and their significances are the very opposite of Reichian insufficiency, he not only rejects that popular writer's weakness for futuristic-fantastic projections, but renders an accounting of the American past that is as plausible as it is complex. Only in his last dozen or so pages of tight conclusion does he attempt a few tentative "applications" to the American society of a later day—including the obligatory Vietnam War reference, interestingly the atypical instance of factual error and/or lack of adequate documentation in his book. It would be fairer to emphasize his thorough knowledge of texts, his relatively rare straining of their meanings, and his reader's clear desire at the end of things for an equally useful sequel.

Regeneration Through Violence does more: it chronicles the origins of American literary genres; and it performs a striking work of myth-criticism on certain early, quasi-literary texts. For America's true founding fathers, Slotkin maintains, were those who

> . . . tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness—the rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers; the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness; the settlers who came after, suffering hardship and Indian warfare for the sake of a sacred mission or a simple desire for land; and the Indians themselves, both as they were and as they appeared to the settlers, for whom they were the special demonic personification of the American wilderness.

Again, "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience." Slotkin's premise is therefore no radical departure from the conclusions generally

✪ JOHN DITSKY teaches American literature and modern drama at the University of Windsor, Ontario. His poems and critical articles have appeared in several journals. Along with his review, Mr. Ditsky sent us a poem, which he wrote as another kind of response to *Regeneration Through Violence*. The poem appears at the end of the review.

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June 22, 1815, 1 A.M., Downing Street.

Stop the press to insert the following letter received this morning by the Lord Mayor.

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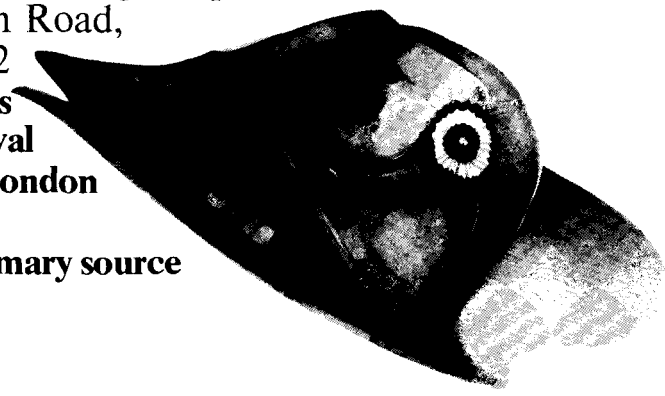

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being arrived at throughout the American culture at present; what he accomplishes, painstakingly and finally overwhelmingly, is the demonstration of the validity of the national hunch about itself. Moreover, his texts are often unfamiliar—Benjamin Church, for example—but they are even more likely to be the better-known Cotton Mather, Filson, Flint and Byrd accounts, together with their literary descendants Cooper, Simms, Bird, Hawthorne and Melville. So that if Slotkin seldom surprises, it is because he has assembled and reasoned well, not because what he has attempted has really been done before. Bringing to bear such materials as Joseph Campbell's monomyth of the hero's journey and Frazer's descriptions of fertility rituals, Slotkin discusses the way the archetype of Daniel Boone evolved in answer to a felt national need: became, for all we know of his "real" existence (Slotkin does not address this problem), the shape to fill our lack. Never brilliant, his style is always serviceable and clear, as he foreshadows additions to his argument without fail, and recapitulates without distorting.

The Puritan paranoia (my term, not Slotkin's) about the encircling wilderness is seen to express itself in the captivity narratives, wherein theoretically helpless white women were taken off to pagan/Catholic existences against their wills, and in the Indian war narratives, wherein the Puritan soldiers found within themselves an incredible capacity for savagery against their enemies—a release of repressed desires that Slotkin claims, surely involved a kind of cannibalism. "Bent simply on destroying the wilderness and replacing it with New England," the Puritan warriors, hunters and missionaries "wished to refuse the cannibal Eucharist that, as in the Indian myth, waited at the end of their sacred hunt; yet their need to survive forced them to cannibalize the spirit and substance of the wilderness and the Indian, against their will and conscience." This deliberately startling contention (of a sort of abiding national Donner party) is Slotkin's premise at its apparently most radical, yet it accounts for the process by which—on the cutting edge of the American experience, the frontier—an ongoing accommodation replaced the threat of Armageddon with a gradual acceptance of the frontiersman as hero instead of as traitor to his kind. Indianized European became "American."

Noting the differing uses to which the Boone narratives were put in various sections of the new United States, Slotkin is most moving when describing the subsuming of the frontier hero into the older concept of an evangelical errand into the wilderness; indeed, when Slotkin compares a passage from Filson in which Boone totals the adversities he has borne with a similar summary in Mrs. Rowlandson, he misses what I suggest is an even greater conscious reference in both writers: the Saint Paul of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the archetypal evangelist in a pagan wilderness who noted, "All things are lawful for me . . . ." It is the missing second clause, ". . . but all things edify not," that characterizes by its absence the course of subsequent American zeal in subjugating the wilderness to the supposed needs of the new Israel. Slotkin's strength lies in missing little of importance in pursuit of his sweeping thesis, and making no attempt whatsoever to exaggerate the real horrors he evokes.

Wesleyan has given *Regeneration Through Violence* the appearance of a textbook, and the comparison is no real disservice to Slotkin: one could easily center a course on this book and those others it cites. With index, notes and a selected bibliography, the volume extends itself readily enough in a number of directions. Yet however clearly printed and carefully proofread (I noted only one typographical error in 565 pages of text), *Regeneration Through Violence* is no mere textbook—and at $25, it is no bargain either: Slotkin thanks Brown and Wesleyan Universities "for financial support," but I must question Wesleyan's apparent attempt to make back its share through a price that might, in these hard times, deprive some scholars and even libraries of its benefits. A pity, for it packs a goodly freight: "D. Boone Kilt a Bar Here" is a message still being carved on all available surfaces, ubiquitous as Kilroy's.

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The Captive

for Richard Slotkin

For the red man brought
me from the Yankee land,
unto this Canada; & now

I am given to all manner
of hellish practices, license
in sex & the bolting down

of strange flesh. I am become
accommodating, frenchified,
ironic, apt to decorate

my lust with wit, my menu
with the sauce of savoir-faire.
I hearken back to stocks

& the gallows-stage; still,
the red slayer in the glass
I turn to holds me here.

The World's Growing Civility?

IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY. *By J. H. Plumb. Houghton Mifflin Co. $6.95*

Reviewed by WERNER L. GUNDERSHEIMER

J. H. Plumb is one of the few contemporary historians who can be considered a man of letters in the eighteenth-century sense. Indeed, he may be one of the last of the Whig historians, a dedicated democratic liberal, committed to reason and suspicious of fanaticism in all its forms. No desiccated rationalist, however, he is also a wise, humane and spirited social observer, who carries the reader along the byways of a searching and perceptive mind.

The present volume is a series of collected essays and reviews, all of which have appeared during the last ten years in various magazines and periodicals. Part one con-

✪ WERNER L. GUNDERSHEIMER is professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book is *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism.*

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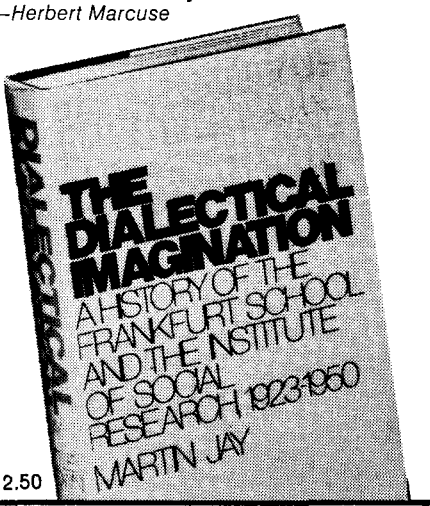

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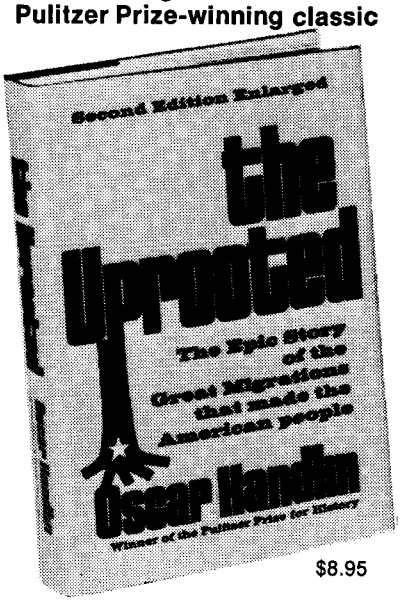

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sists of ten essays dealing with eighteenth-century subjects, while part two, entitled "In the Light of History," offers fifteen pieces of essentially contemporary interest. A final section provides three longish afterthoughts on other historical periods, including a delightful essay on Edwardian England.

Unlike many historians, Professor Plumb seems at his best when his emotions are deeply engaged in a subject, and he is fortunately a man easily aroused. In "Edmund Burke and his Cult," both the man and the conservative tradition he inspired are vigorously punctured. Giving Burke due credit for "compelling eloquence," Professor Plumb remarks of his writings that "it is extraordinary that such lucubrations should be regarded as having any intellectual value whatsoever—emotional value for those who need them [*sic*] perhaps, but intellectually most of Burke's political philosophy is utter rubbish, and completely unhistorical."

While instinctively rejecting intellectual traditions that emphasize instinct and nonrational commitment, Professor Plumb is not hostile to intellectual system-builders. In his two essays on American slavery, or rather, on books about American slavery, he expresses deep appreciation for the works of recent historical theoreticians of slavery, especially Eugene Genovese, whom he regards not only as "one of the leading historians of the South," but also as "a Marxist historian in every way as gifted and as subtle as Hill, Hobsbawm or Soboul, and at times just as opaque."

It is, however, in the second group of essays that the author's gift for relating contemporary issues and behavior to long-standing human problems and dilemmas appears at its best. Professor Plumb has a deft sense for the absorbing current issue, but he never loses sight of the interconnectedness of events and movements. Thus, in "Secular Heretics," the promiscuous adolescents of the sixties are compared to the Brethren of the Free Spirit in Cologne in 1325, and the Ranters and Quakers in seventeenth-century England. Hippie behavior—with its emphasis on rejection of conventional morality, its affirmation of poverty and renunciation of worldliness, its free sexuality, and its recourse to pharmacological agents for changing consciousness—takes its place in a tradition that Professor Plumb views as profoundly religious, and that he traces back beyond Saint Francis. Just as the author analyzes the social function of the new cult by comparing the institutional structures of contemporary Western society to those of the Italian and Flemish towns in the late Middle Ages, so does he spot its fatal weakness by referring to its social roots and roles: "In the absence of a political creed and of a programme, the hippies must be regarded as a symptom, not a social force—they are a living phantom bred by the decadent hypocrisy of so much of America's social and political morality." To say that they are not in some important way a social force strikes me as odd, although the question cannot be argued here. In this piece, and in his essays on the family, and on children, the author probes some of the tensions in contemporary social institutions, and calls attention to the problem of their continuing viability. Some aspects of the essays on American life in the late sixties are already dated, as perhaps in the overly optimistic end of "Riot," where there is a speculation that continuing repression may provoke organized resistance of a disciplined kind.

In many of these essays, an interesting and mellow theme occurs. It is that over the centuries Western man has become a bit more civilized. He expresses himself more tamely, less vigorously, and less dangerously. Thus, in "Angst," the be-ins of the sixties are viewed as quiet and serene as compared to the behavior of medieval flagellants. In "The Stars in Their Day," newspaper horoscopes are seen as rather watered-down versions of the old beliefs in astrology. In "Bedlam," where the development of modern ideas on the treatment of insanity is discussed, and where the author seems to owe quite a bit to Michel Foucault, Professor Plumb gives his most powerful expression of this Voltairean perspective: "And, when, as we so often do, we despise our own world, belittle our own

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achievements, ignore the world's growing civility, it is as well to be reminded of such things" as the ancient baiting of the village idiot, and so forth.

But the author is too clever to be a mere Pollyanna, and in other places he seems less sure about the world's growing civility. In "Their Excellencies," he offers a deft analysis of the work and status of ambassadors, concluding that "to tar and feather an ambassador or his staff should seem, even to a Red Guard, like an affront to humanity and its aspirations." After the Khartoum murders, this point could perhaps be amplified. And although he refers to "slaughter in the concentration camps, or mangling of the innocent by bombs," and cites the hecatombs of war dead in this century, the few glimmers of hope seem more impressive to Professor Plumb than the demonic realities of this monstrous age of ours. This is a perspective to be envied and savored, although, in the light of history, it cannot be fully shared.

Essence and Soul

THE EMERGENCE OF RICHARD WRIGHT: A STUDY IN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY. *By Keneth Kinnamon. University of Illinois Press.* $7.50.

Reviewed by AL-TONY GILMORE

With the publication of *Native Son* in 1940, Richard Wright clearly established himself as one of the most prominent writers of his generation. Surprisingly, however, it was not until 1968 that the first full-length biography of Wright appeared (Constance Webb's *Richard Wright*). One reviewer, after praising that book as a pioneering work, remarked rather despairingly that "because we need desperately to recover his life for our imagination and sense of where we are and how we got there, this study will have to serve until

AL-TONY GILMORE is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Howard University. His articles have appeared in various scholarly journals.

The Civil War

ABRAHAM COWLEY

Edited by ALLAN D. PRITCHARD

The Civil War is a poem which Cowley (1618-67) did not complete, for political and historical reasons, and of which only the first volume was published; the other two volumes having been considered lost. Professor Pritchard recently found two copies of the complete poem in England and here presents a corrected edition of all three books. $10.00

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Edited by BALACHANDRA RAJAN

The tercentenary of the publication of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* is celebrated in this volume of essays, which commemorates what tradition has regarded as Milton's final poetic communication. Contributed by internationally eminent scholars such as Arthur Barker, Barbara Lewalski, Balachandra Rajan, Irene Samuel, and Northrop Frye, these essays maintain a high level of humanistic criticism and form a major contribution to our knowledge of Milton's last two poems. $8.50

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the one we should have been waiting for comes along."

Although Keneth Kinnamon's *The Emergence of Richard Wright* is not and was not designed to be a full-length biography, it should without question satisfy those who have patiently waited for a critical study that sets among its objectives an analysis not only of Wright's early years but more importantly of the relation of those years to his writings. In short, Kinnamon's book is concerned with the life, literary career and social milieu of Richard Wright from his birth in 1908 through the publication of *Native Son*. Such a conceptual framework for discerning the essence and "soul" of Wright, the man and his writings, is to be applauded, for the author has admirably shown that Wright was a writer whose literary and social consciences were inextricably linked. In explaining this approach to Wright, the author says, "If the reader is concerned with the relation of literature to society, he must not be content merely to grant the novelist his materials and concentrate on his fictional technique; he must examine carefully the factual substance on which the novelist's imagination operates. If this task is preliminary to literary criticism in the strict sense, it is necessary if that criticism is not to be impressionistic or narrowly aesthetic."

Thus, in the initial chapter, "The Burdens of Caste and Class," Kinnamon, in methodology not unlike that of the historian, a sort rarely seen in works of literary criticism, traces the entire social, economic and political environment of Wright's early existence. Born black to sharecropper parents in Natchez, Mississippi, Wright was earmarked to be the prey of racism, poverty and faulty education. Pointing out numerous instances of violence manifested against blacks in every city, town and hamlet in which the Wright family lived, the author contends that the violence that crops up repeatedly in nearly all of Wright's works through *Native Son* is simply a literary translation of his existence in a hostile white America.

Upon graduating from grammar school —his ninth and final year of formal educa-

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tion—he was elected class valedictorian. Taking odds and ends of jobs, he slowly worked his way from Mississippi to Chicago, a route familiar to many of his race and region. Far from being a promised land, Chicago, when Wright arrived there in 1927, was, nevertheless, a dramatic improvement over the Deep South. When the depression began to wane, he gravitated to the John Reed Club, a meeting place for left-wing artists and intellectuals of all races, and from there found himself a member of the Communist Party. As Kinnamon carefully demonstrates, however, Wright was attracted to the Communist Party primarily because it encouraged his ambition to be a writer.

The early writings of Wright, many of which will be new to most readers, have been carefully and judiciously analyzed in the second chapter, "A Literary Apprenticeship." Although the author sharply criticizes the style, plots and artistic merit of many of those works, he is still able—although sometimes stretching a point—to relate and positively identify these writings with some prior experience of Wright.

The middle sections of this study are devoted to critiques of the works that skyrocketed Wright from virtual obscurity to international fame: *Lawd Today, Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son.*

In the final chapter, the epilogue, Kinnamon attempts to assess the uniqueness and significance of Wright as an American writer by comparing and contrasting him with his forerunners and contemporaries. The author then concludes that the significance of Wright is not one of fictional technique or literary history. "It is rather the point of the relevance of his work to American society, particularly, of course, to that social problem which has been the central 'American dilemma'—the role of the black man in national life."

Professor Kinnamon's book is by far the best book written on and about the life and writings of Wright. It should be a worthy addition to the library shelves of all persons interested in American literature and a *must* for all scholars of Afro-American literature.

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The Reader Replies

THE READER REPLIES *carries miscellaneous comments by readers and authors on various articles that have appeared in the magazine. All communications should be addressed to: Editor,* THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1811 Q Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20009. Because of space limitations we cannot guarantee to print all letters received.*

—EDITOR

An important distinction is made by Jerzy Kosinski in the SCHOLAR's Spring issue between the male and female "points of view" as offered in the personal confession magazines. He points out that "those supposedly written by women either celebrate the transgressions of social taboos . . . or emphasize the impossibility of avoiding sin. . . . The male point of view on the other hand produces stories implying a certain amount of moral character and judgment." Although confessor and audience are assumed by these magazines to be equally shallow, regardless of gender, one may see that in terms of the male and female archetypes that are presented, it is the male which represents the generic, while the female is in fact outside traditional concepts of personhood. This pattern is being explored by feminists in all fields—theology, philosophy, literature and drama, visual arts, the psychotherapeutic situation, et cetera. Its recognition is common and basic to feminist literature. In terms of human possibility, the ambiguous position of the female within the very human race is an even greater tragedy than the spiritual sloth, hypocrisy and cowardice of a North American reading public. Kosinski has performed a valuable service in showing up this precariously fascistic double standard in yet another typical American phenomenon.

POLLY THOMPSON
Toronto, Canada

* * *

I suggest that THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR initiate immediately a section in each issue titled, "Department of Firm Grasp of the Obvious." Too bad you don't already have such a category; the Winter issue's piece by George Gerbner, "Teacher Image and the Hidden Curriculum," would be a prime example. His thesis that school and teacher are presented in a less than heroic dimension because that is the way Americans see their schools and teachers prompts only one response: So what else is new?

Other Ho-Hum Gems:

"The more schools change the more they streamline their induction of young people into their places and roles in existing social structures."

". . . the laws of this symbolic world are entirely socially and culturally determined."

"How things work out in mass-produced symbolic systems, as in all collective myths, celebrations and rituals, is indicative of institutional interests and pressures."

But why continue to copy out shining examples of profound restatements of what the author, and apparently your editors, thought was a mind-boggling insight into mass media symbols vis-à-vis school and teacher? If this sounds unduly cranky, chalk it up to my high level of expectations whenever the new issue of the SCHOLAR arrives. Usually those expectations are amply fulfilled, as with a companion piece to the one under the gun: "New Concepts in the Evolution of Complexity, Part II." Now that stirred up my synapses.

But if you do insist on offering space, paper, and ink to writers with a stranglehold on the self-evident, I want to get in line. I've got this monograph, see, which proves, after years of living and research, plus a chilly dip into symbolic logic, that "Two Plus Two Equals Four." A real mind-grabber.

EDWARD WEGENER
Auburn, Alabama

* * *

The article by George Gerbner is an especially superb article. From a different point of view, I was trying to make similar points in *The Experience of Nothingness* and *Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove*. In fact, it was the employment of categories like his about symbol and sensibility that led me to the notion of ethnic consciousness. If you are a young Slavic kid, and your parents don't speak English very well, and your teacher is

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Anglo-Saxon or Irish, there is a strong sense of unreality, alienation and cultural repression. One has to try to make oneself into someone that one isn't. In our society, Americanization has been a rewarding thing to accept and perhaps necessary, but the price has also been high, and perhaps means can be found by which our society can do even better.

MICHAEL NOVAK
Baysville, New York

* * *

While applauding your recognition that *something* is going on among "women" with respect to their roles in American society, I have been dismayed at the naïveté of the efforts of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR to date (Autumn, 1972 and Winter 1972/73) to explain it to its readers. Being a member of Phi Beta Kappa and a long-time reader of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, I would have expected a treatment on the same level of scholarship as that given other subjects written about in the publication.

The title of the original treatment, "Women on Women," makes no more sense than an article on "Men on Men," and neither of them—unless of course you are dealing with the subject of sexual activities of homosexuals —makes any more sense than an article on "People on People." At least you did not make the usual mistake of heading the report on "women's liberation" without defining the term (although the forum is entitled that) but nowhere in the original discussion or in subsequent critiques, has *anybody* ever said what it is she is talking about. "Women" make up more than half the world's population, and almost anything anybody might say about that many people would be true, in some circumstances—*what about women?* That is the question which has no more been answered in your pages than in any others.

One of the commentators in the Winter issue made a distinction between "women's liberation" and "the women's movement" but never defined or gave any intimation of what she meant by either one.

Actually the comments which you have printed have been noteworthy not because they were made by "women" but by particular individuals who happen to be women but whose reputations and distinctions have come in fields totally unrelated to the legal, sociological and psychological examination of the roles of males and females, the extent to which sex discrimination (advantageous as well as

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disadvantageous) exists for males as well as females, changes in the laws (for example, sex discrimination in employment has been against the federal law since 1963 and 1964, but none of your writers seems to be really aware of this and none urges women to make use of the new laws)—changes which might be desirable or undesirable. They are women who neither in their professional nor in their personal lives appear to have attached much importance to these matters or identified themselves with efforts to change them. (Even Ms. Hellman, in spite of her book, is not identified with any organized effort that could be described as a "movement.") Their comments on these matters are interesting and noteworthy because they are successes in their chosen fields—their comments on war, peace, education, et cetera would be read with equal interest because of their reputations, but not because they are considered experts in those areas.

Furthermore, none of the persons asked to comment on the question "what will we lose" asked, "lose if *what*? Under what circumstances? Or what will *who* lose? Me, middle-aged, professional, married? My twenty-five-year-old daughter, married, having worked to put her husband through college, now taking care of her year-old son? My twenty-one-year-old daughter, senior in college, looking for a job? My husband? My brothers? WHO?"

This is not to say that only women who are identified with the feminist ("the theory, cult or practice of those who advocate such legal and social changes as will establish political, economic and social equality of the sexes"—feminism—*Webster's Unabridged*) movement should be asked to comment on it, but surely a discussion among such women as Betty Friedan, whose reputation as a writer as well as a research scholar is well established, Wilma Scott Heide, behavioral scientist who is president of the National Organization for Women, Jeanette Rankin, that marvelous pioneer in women's rights, still vigorous physically and mentally at ninety-two, would better serve your readers than what you have published to date, with all respect to the eminent women who have participated. . . .

. . . I hope that I have conveyed my feeling not of irritation but of concern that—of all people—members and friends of Phi Beta Kappa gain some understanding of what the movement expressed through the formation and activities of such organizations as NOW is all about, and with understanding will support it so that we may all sooner be on our way of using our talents without the present complications and restrictions of outgrown sex roles.

ELIZA PASCHALL MORRISON
Atlanta, Georgia

* * *

Perhaps what the Autumn SCHOLAR's assemblage of distinguished women failed, yet needed, to discuss was femininity. Seen in terms of an elusive but important definition, the original question may have been substantive. This quest would be predicated on an assumption—perhaps unacceptable to some of those present—that *la différence* does indeed have to do with matters less obvious than reproductive functions.

The late Frances G. Wickes, a liberated woman if ever there was one, said to me near the close of a long professional career that she regretted having been forced by circumstances to rely so much on her developed masculine functions and to lose touch with her feminine nature. She did not elaborate, nor did she need to for my benefit, for I knew well the terms and concepts of her thinking.

Of course, all this is in part a personal matter, as well as a universal one. Some women, and some men, will always be more "equal" than others, for which dispensation we might well be thankful. And the richest feminine natures may often turn out to be more ambivalent than men. (President McGill of Columbia was putting women up, not down!) But men need liberating, too—from the Hemingway syndrome with its over-emphasis on muscles and testicles. We need to differentiate the male animal from the masculine spirit. In this, Freud and Margaret Mead have been no help.

The member of your Board displayed both wisdom and humility in asking the question. Her wisdom perhaps lay in her distrust of naïve egalitarianism as further obscuring profound factors that our age already devalues. Her humility lay in her avoiding any pat answer to her own question.

JOHN PARKE
Burlington, Vermont

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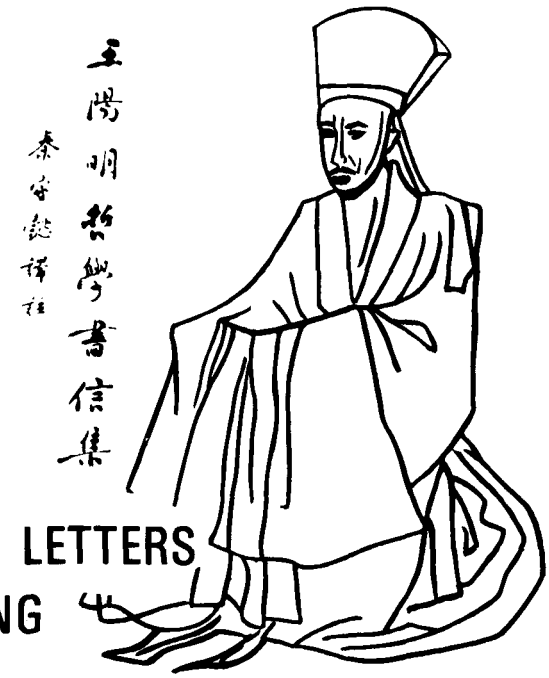

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